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To Joe From Fr. James
Christmas 1927.

Catholic fiction

BUNNY'S HOUSE

BUNNY'S HOUSE

A Novel

by

E. M. WALKER



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BUNNY'S HOUSE

CHAPTER I

“The Glory and the Freshness of a Dream”

THE TWO boys from North London pushed roughly past the officer's wife, comfortably established with magazines and lunch basket in the corner seat. The express was passing Sutton's Seed Testing Ground, and their attention had been caught by the brilliant patches of color. Cyril Sturt's bulky form blocked the window, so that Ernest Grills, who was shorter and slighter, had to stand upon a suit-case in order to peer over his shoulder. The officer's wife, who owned the suit-case, gave him a furious glance and drew back her smart linen skirt, but something in the aspect of the boys warned her of the unwisdom of entering into any altercation with them. Cyril was tall for his age and rather stout, but he did not look healthy. His face was pasty and spotted, his dark hair lank

and dull. His nose turned up, and there was an insolent expression in his brown eyes. Ernest was fair, with gray eyes and a pale, clear skin. He had a pleasant face, but his features were irregular, and his mouth had a nervous twist which became more apparent when he smiled. Both boys spoke with an unmistakable Cockney twang, and their shrill voices rang out above the steady rattle of the train. It was their first real holiday, although they had been several times to Southend, and Cyril remembered one ecstatic week-end at Brighton. He thought of it as a big block of houses, a concert-party tent into which small boys could peep by lying on their stomachs in the sand, while, in the background, a sheet of blue-green water had been very wetting and offensively salt.

But to-day they were starting on a very different adventure. They were to have a fortnight's holiday in a part of England wholly outside their experience and that of their companions. Fortunate boys! On the big map hanging on the classroom wall, their master had pointed to the name of the town near which lived the eccentric old gentleman whose whim it was to offer hospitality on his farm of Bunny's

House to two London boys. And the choice had fallen upon Cyril and Ernest. Both came of respectable working-class families, both were about to leave school. This was to be their wander-fortnight before they settled down to the business of life. No wonder that their high spirits prompted them to cheek the guard! Like the officer's lady, he avoided a passage of arms with them. Authority needs to be wielded with discretion. There are many occasions when it is wise to hold it in reserve.

Their master had felt this often. He was not altogether sorry to see the last of these two, for Cyril had a way of upsetting the whole class, and Ernest invariably stood in with him. In spite of this, they were not bad boys as boys went, and he was glad that this holiday had come their way at the close of their school career. He told them so in a fatherly manner when he said good-by to them at the door of the Council School; and then, with a view to the honor of the national system of education, he slipped in a word about the gratitude due to their host, Mr. Warfelton of Marraton, and the politeness with which they ought to treat him.

"Oh, we'll be very perlite at meals at Bunny's

House, Sir," Cyril assured him, and he began to munch after the manner of the Belgian hare which belonged to his next-door neighbor.

"Still, they're fairly creditable," thought the master, with a little sigh, as he watched them cross the playground for the last time. "I don't think they'll turn out bad men. But they're so young yet, and with no discipline at home! . . . Well, I can't do everything, but I've done my best."

That was two days ago, and now they were on their way to Bunny's House, with tickets to Saltash in their pockets.

The Cornish express rushed forward through the green brilliance of the summer landscape. Ernest was only conscious of interminable sky and fields which became at length monotonous and boring. As his companion was by this time lost in a novel, he went out into the corridor and stood swaying up and down with some bananas and a cigarette. Presently he began to feel very sick. Regaining his seat, he leaned back, and tried to doze. "Let me alone—I'm queer," he said, when Cyril nudged him. Later, he opened his eyes and saw Cyril voraciously eating up the two portions of lunch. Later still, he smelt

tobacco, and heard the disagreeable lady opposite protesting. Then all was quiet again. Cyril had gone back to his book. On the glaring cover, an objectionable-looking man was stooping to kiss a silly painted girl. It made Ernest giddy to look at the crude colors. Quickly, he closed his eyes again.

At Plymouth the guard turned them out, and here, in a hot and crowded station, they felt themselves in familiar surroundings. They never gave a thought to the lady who had promised to meet them, but headed straight for the refreshment room. After three cups of tea and two Cornish pasties, Ernest felt better. He swallowed the substantial pastry and peppery mixture of herbs and potatoes with great satisfaction. The faint sick sensation passed off, and he marched jauntily after Cyril, jingling the coppers in his pockets, to extract biscuits and postcards from a penny-in-the-slot machine. They were engrossed in this when a lady came up to them.

"Are you the boys for Bunny's House?" she asked. "But wherever have you been? I began to be afraid you hadn't come."

Pleasantly and capably she took charge of them,

inquired as to their hand luggage, and helped Cyril to recover the bulky brown paper parcel containing a change of clothes, which he had abandoned in the refreshment room. Then she piloted them across steps to the local train. To the boys, she was just a convenient presence, someone quite friendly and helpful. Afterwards, when Ernest looked back, he had no clear remembrance of her features, eyes or hair; all he recollected was that she was not very tall, and that she was neat and tidy like a Sunday School Miss. So very tidy! And she carried a black-and-white parasol.

The train steamed in leisurely fashion past rows of houses, a busy suburban-like station called Devonport, then some quite small stations. Presently it crossed over a strange kind of railway bridge, and Ernest, jumping up, looked down upon a river with several big gray objects motionless upon it. "Powder ships," said Miss Warfelton.

And so at last they came to Saltash, and followed their guardian over the bridge and through the little country station. Outside, a short, stoutish man with a grizzly beard was standing by a two-wheeled cart.

He touched his cap to Miss Warfelton. She climbed up beside him, directing the boys to get in behind.

"Good afternoon, Tredinnick," she said. "I'm afraid we've kept you waiting. I couldn't find the boys at Plymouth, and we missed the first train. Drive straight to Bunny's House."

That was a glorious drive. Once clear of the quaint long Fore Street, the lads were in open country such as they had never seen before. After a time, they turned off the high road into a lane. Ernest caught at the fern and brambles as they drove between high banks, and fell to sucking his pricked fingers.

Then, at the top of a steep hill, the lane curved, and below them, in a valley full of trees, were a few cottages and the gray tower of a church.

"Orchards," said Miss Warfelton.

"What, apples?" gasped Cyril.

"Cherries mostly. But you must get out now and walk down the steepest part of the hill, because the four of us are rather heavy for the horse."

When Ernest's feet touched the ground, a wild fit of exhilaration swept over him. The beauty of rural nature, all unconscious of it as he was, went to his

head. He sniffed up the fresh country scents delightedly. "What makes everything smell so nice?" he cried. He felt extraordinarily strong; he had slept a long time in the train, and had really made a very good meal of tea and pasties, so with a wild whoop off he started, running down the hill. It was steeper than he thought, for he had no experience of such hills, and very soon he found he could not stop, but was obliged to dash forward faster and faster with gathering momentum, until somewhere near the bottom he caught his foot on a stone and came down with a crash, cutting his face and making his nose bleed. "You fool!" shouted Cyril as he came up to him. But although Miss Warfelton reproved him, she was not altogether unsympathetic. She put a cool bit of slate down his back to stop the bleeding of his nose, made him climb up into the cart again, and lent him her pocket-handkerchief. He felt subdued, and his head began to ache. However, they were nearly at their journey's end. Another bend in the road, a strip of level lane with the chimneys of Marraton peeping through the trees on their right, one more descent, shorter and less steep, and then came the glint of water and Bunny's House.

They saw a long, low building with a clump of trees behind it, standing a little back from the creek. It was indeed a very ancient house, but the boys were too ignorant to realize this. They only knew that it was not like the houses to which they were accustomed. But Mrs. Tredinnick was in the doorway to greet them, and, for all its strangeness, there was something unaccountably familiar and home-like in the whole scene.

"Why, it's just like the Pictures!" exclaimed Cyril.

He spoke truly. Hitherto, only on the cinematograph, had they had any experience of such scenes, such life. But this was real. Mrs. Tredinnick was very real indeed.

She was almost an old woman, though still active, and she had not a gray hair. Her decided nose with a bend in it, the arch of her eyebrows and the corresponding curve of her lips, gave her face what Ernest described as a "curvy" look. The brown eyes were friendly and inquisitive, but she was a little on her guard: she had suffered from London boys before.

"I'm pleased to see you," she said, "and the tea's more than ready. But you must wash your hands first."

They had a splendid tea. The memory of it lingered long with Ernest, and months afterwards the sensation of hunger used to conjure up a vision of the long low kitchen, with hams hanging from the rafters and a spray of roses slanting across the window. Ernest enjoyed it all more than Cyril, but Cyril ate much more than Ernest. "It's me butter," said Mrs. Tredinnick, gratified. Later, they were to discover to their amazement that "me butter" was made fresh in a wooden bowl every morning by her own cool, lean, brown hands. It gave Ernest, whose ambition was to be an "engineer," his first faint misgiving as to the all-sufficiency of machinery.

The long, beautiful day wore to a close at last. Shadows fell early round the tree-girt creek, but it was still daylight at nine o'clock when they found themselves tucked up together between the sweet-smelling sheets of the big bed. Mrs. Tredinnick stood over them motherly fashion and wished them good-night.

"May you sleep well, and God bless you!" she said. Then, as an afterthought: "Said your prayers?"

"Prayers!" ejaculated Cyril. "What next?"

"Children say prayers," explained Ernest. "We're too big."

"You mean to tell me you just shake off your clothes and lie down like cats and dogs!" Mrs. Tredinnick gave a snort and her eyebrows went up. "Town ways, I suppose." But she glanced down at Ernest, with his fair hair, pale face, and sensitive twitchy mouth, and thought of how stalwart her own boy had been at his age—her only boy, who had lately joined up and was training in the Cornwalls. "Well, God bless you, all the same—I dare say it's not your fault."

The next moment she was gone. Cyril giggled, but Ernest was secretly just a little troubled. He did not like disapproval. He felt that because he had not said his prayers, Mrs. Tredinnick thought him very ignorant, very ill-bred. While he was trying to remember certain prayers he had been taught during a few casual attendances at a Congregational Sunday School, he fell asleep.

Three hours later he woke with a start. An owl screeched, and for the moment he was under the impression that it was a police whistle. Then he re-

membered where he was. He slipped out of bed and stole to the window. Under the trees it was very dark, but overhead the sky was luminous with stars and the eerie light of the crescent moon. He knelt on the window-seat and listened. At first he found something almost appalling in the stillness; it made him afraid. Then, as he grew accustomed to it, his ears began to detect the multitudinous sounds hidden in the silence. Leaves rustled, and the owl screeched once more. Birds called strangely to one another, and the frogs in the marsh to the right kept up a steady croak. *Crunch-crunch*, went Tredinnick's greedy mare in the paddock behind the farm.

Ernest did not understand some of these sounds, but he recognized them as natural and friendly. He listened to them with pleasure. Then he looked up into the sky, which for all its solitary remoteness seemed curiously part of earth here. As he looked, he began to feel extraordinarily safe. He crept back into bed and fell asleep, more deeply this time.

Next day Farmer Tredinnick took the lads up to Marraton to see Mr. Warfelton.

Marraton was a big house—not so big as the

Council School or the British Museum, but in its way quite as imposing, because people really lived in it. Mr. Warfelton, a little clean-shaven old gentleman, was writing at a table in a large room lined with books. He was only about half the size of Mr. Tredinnick. He shook hands with the boys very kindly and asked them to dinner on Sunday after church. "Of course you'll go to church," he said. "You can sit in my pew—it's the front one—and we'll walk home together. Now, run along—good boys! good boys! And don't get up to any mischief. Bless the lad (to Ernest)! You're leaving quite a river behind you. How did you get your boots in that state? Been in the water already?"

"No, Sir," replied Ernest. "I've only been standing at the edge of the duck-pond. I had to wash out Miss's handkerchief she lent me."

"Dear! Dear! Mrs. Tredinnick would have done that for you. Never mind! Go along and make sweet hay—it isn't so ruinous to clothes and carpets as washing handkerchiefs in ponds."

In the hall they came upon Miss Warfelton, and Ernest handed over the handkerchief, neatly folded—a little, damp, mud-colored square.

"How do you make sweet hay, Mr. Tredinnick?" questioned Cyril.

"Oh, you'll learn in time right enough," answered the farmer, with a twinkle in his eye. "It's a bit catchy to do it properly. Experience is the safe master, you'll find."

Only towards the close of their visit did the boys discover that "making sweet hay" meant snatching a kiss from the Marraton dairy-maid under a wisp of clover.

When the tide was coming in, the water in the little creek used to flow up with quite a strong current, salt and fresh from the sea. The boys would sit on Bunny's Quay, dangling their feet over the side, and watch the seaweed drifting by, and the little crabs crawling over the mud and stones. They made some fishing-rods with bent pins for hooks, but they never caught anything. Mrs. Tredinnick required them to give her their word of honor that they would not scuffle together, nor lean over and fall into the water, and they kept their promise in a way which proved that the efforts of the Council schoolmaster had not been utterly in vain. Once, the farmer took them for a row in his boat. He rowed right out of the creek

into a wide river, and then he hoisted a sail and they slid slowly through the water past mysterious woods and sloping fields of a wonderful soft green, for the wheat and barley were still young. When the wind blew, the cornfields rippled like a sea. On wet days, Mrs. Tredinnick let them play at smugglers in the pantry, where the black rafters were riddled with bullet holes. This had been the bar in the old times when Bunny's House was a water-side inn, and many a fight had taken place here. On fine days, they would climb up and up through the steep fields at the back of Marraton, until their eyes could range over the whole countryside, taking in the river—two rivers, indeed—and the low, mysterious, smoky-blue line of Dartmoor behind. In the far distance lay the sea. There were cows to milk and pigs to feed and fruit to pick and hay to make, and the good-natured stout old farmer explained everything and taught them to help. Soon they became quite handy. He was so sorry for them too. "Couldn't live in a town myself," he said. "'Tisn't being alive."

Mr. Warfelton's man Harry was quite young. He had gray eyes and curly hair, was of medium height and slim, and walked with a springy step as though

he could never tire. Yet even he could not keep the vast, untidy gardens of Marraton in anything like order. There were not many like him about—nearly all the young men of his physique were in the Army. But some at least of the fit among the sons of the soil had to stay at home for the work of food production. Land—corn—potatoes—cows—pigs—sheep! These, then, were part of England. Everything did not arrive by way of the docks.

On Sunday, the two boys, clean and tidy, walked together to the old gray church. They knew little about the interior of churches; they knew still less of the church service. Cyril's parents never went to any "place of worship" as they termed it; Ernest's father paid a very occasional visit to a chapel of a Sunday evening. The boys had not much idea of what was going on, and were quite unable to follow the service in the prayer-books with which Miss Warfelton provided them, although she made herself very busy finding their places. Long before the sermon, they had begun to experience a difficulty in refraining from fidgeting.

At last the rector went into the pulpit. He was a small elderly man with a neatly trimmed white

beard, who spoke in a monotonous voice, clearing his throat between every sentence. The subject of his sermon was the Plagues of Egypt; but the story, which might have been so thrilling, carried no conviction to the boys, clothed as it was in scholarly, old-fashioned words, interspersed with copious Scripture texts. Cyril twisted round to get a better view of a recumbent figure carved in stone, that lay still and rigid in a niche of the bare wall. Ernest listened to the preacher, gathering a vague impression of an irascible Deity whom it was prudent to propitiate. Every now and then he wrote swiftly with his forefinger on the dusty book-ledge one of the more difficult words. Had it been a dictation lesson, he could have made but a poor attempt at it, he thought. He was busy with the puzzling word "unfeignedly" when he caught Mr. Warfelton's menacing frown, so he leaned back with an air of resignation, and subjected to an exhaustive examination the five little girls who sat on one side of the chancel and the three little boys on the other. And the preacher's voice went on:—

"Is God unrighteous, then, that taketh vengeance? No, there is such a thing as an act of retribution.

The Egyptians had slain the children of the Israelites, casting their infants into the river. Now the affliction was turned upon themselves; the delight of their eyes was taken from them; all their firstborn were dead, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sat upon his throne, unto the firstborn of the captive languishing in his dungeon."

It remained to point the moral, and to draw a lesson for the present day from those bygone ages. This, however, was lost upon Ernest. Mr. Warfelton's eyes were closed, and a little white butterfly was hovering over his bald head. Was the old gentleman asleep, or had he merely shut his eyes in order to attend better? Would the butterfly tickle him awake with a start? Before it had made up its mind where to alight, the concluding sentences rang out in a more vigorous tone:

"All these occurrences combine to prove how essential it was for the Israelites that they should be forewarned and instructed, and how salutary was the lesson taught them by God's dealings with Pharaoh. It is our duty also reverently and conscientiously to ponder the lessons conveyed to us in the Holy Writ, in order that as individuals we may be preserved

from subsequent iniquities, and as a nation from national disaster."

A rustle of relief, above which rose the clergyman's decided accents:

"Hymn number one hundred and eighty."

Ernest found the page quickly. When he looked up he saw that Mr Warfelton had placed a penny on the book-ledge in front of each boy in readiness for the collection. This, the old gentleman considered, was part of his duty as host.

The lady with the bobbing cherries in her hat first played the tune through, and then the choir took up the air. "To Christ, the Prince of Peace," they began. Hymn singing appealed to the boys. It was not a difficult tune, and they soon found themselves joining in with none the less good will because in their ignorance they had scarcely more than an elementary glimmer of what the verses meant.

*"Deep in His Heart for us
The wound of love He bore."*

There was something soothing and fragrant in the words, translated (although no one in the church was aware of this) from the Latin of the Old Office of the

Sacred Heart. They cleared the atmosphere after the thunders of the Plagues of Egypt. These two children had never been taught clearly that the Poor Man of Nazareth was the Lord of Heaven and Earth. To them, He was just a mythical Figure connected with what they called "religion," and in their eyes religion was on the whole silly and boring. Yet it was a subject which Ernest at least could not have discussed without an effort. And this shyness of his was really unconscious reverence.

The very sparse congregation filed out. At the door Mr. Warfelton turned: "Come along, little Bunnies," he said with charming benignity. He walked with Ernest, and Cyril followed with Miss Warfelton. "We'll take this path," said the Squire. "I just want to see my poor wife."

The grassy path led to a grave under a yew tree. It lay a little apart from the others, its turf was neatly clipped, and in the center was a round shallow tin filled with fresh flowers. The headstone told how Rachel, the dearly loved wife of Samuel Warfelton of Marraton, had been buried here in the sixty-second year of her age. Underneath these

particulars were the words: "I shall go to her, but she shall not return to me." Mr. Warfelton looked down at the plot with a placid, not unhappy gravity. "Bless you, my dear!" he murmured. Years had robbed the loss of its bitterness, and besides, he looked forward with childlike trust to the day of reunion which could not be very far distant now.

"By Jove! those begonias are fine, Sisceta," he said to his niece. "One of your dear Aunt's favorite flowers. I really believe that pink one there measures six and a half inches across. 'Pon my soul! Ceta, you've the knack of making things grow. Or is it Harry?"

"I think Harry's *forte* is turnips, Uncle. Or pigs."

"No, hayricks," said Mr. Warfelton. "There's no one like Harry for a rick, unless it's old Menhinick. I never remember a bad one except the year before last. Do you recollect? It was so hot that I allowed Master Menhinick a double portion of cider. And when I went up in the afternoon he was sitting under the hedge awfully happy. 'Isn't it a b-b-beautiful

rick, Sir!' he said. Heaven help me! but it was heeling over like a ship in a gale, only he couldn't see it. 'Isn't it a b-b-beautiful rick, indeed!'"

His boyish laugh rang out as he turned away, striding with respectful familiarity over the graves, to gain the gate by a shorter cut. There was nothing in that laugh to hurt the dead if it reached their ears. To Mr. Warfelton they were still part of the parish.

At dinner the boys tasted the famous Marraton cider. Mr. Warfelton himself filled their glasses for the second time. "Don't be silly, Ceta," he said. "It'll do them good. Anyway, it's too pure to hurt a fly." Sisceta—"my Two-seater," as her uncle called her jokingly, in allusion to the small motor car to which finances had never run—shook her head. The lads, however, drank up their cider and began to feel very cheerful and almost at home. Without effort, and in no wise from politeness, they laughed at their host's tales.

"Forty miles we had ridden that day," he said, "and I can tell you we were ready for tea, so when we came to the Green Dragon, we rode round to the stables and ordered a good feed for the horses. 'And for ourselves,' said my friend Jim, 'we'll have

eggs. Let me see—I think, twelve. Yes, twelve eggs.’ And he gave me a wink on the sly. You bet the little waitress’s eyebrows went up when we ordered twelve eggs! However! Well, she brought the eggs and we ate them all. What d’you think of that, young gentlemen? And then we turned the empty shells of six upside down so that they looked as though they hadn’t been touched. Presently, in comes the little maid, rather prim and sarcastic, like you, Ceta my dear, when I ask you to draw an extra jug of cider; and, says she: ‘I thought you’d ordered more than you could eat.’ ‘Never mind,’ says I, ‘since you’ve boiled ’em, we’ll pay for ’em.’ Upon my soul! she must have had the surprise of her life when we were gone.”

“But you need only have paid for six, Sir,” cried Cyril, “if you’d hooked it quick enough.”

“Bless the boy! I wasn’t a thief—except sometimes when I passed an orchard. I won’t pretend that I could always pass an orchard when I was your age. But mind you! that’s not for imitation.”

On their way home that Sunday afternoon, the boys made a grotto in the avenue. There were two ways of going from Marraton to Bunny’s House: one,

the narrow cartroad that led to Bunny's Quay; and the other, a private path that passed through a noble avenue of beech trees, and then fell abruptly down an orchard to the back door of the farm. It was in the avenue that the boys built their grotto, propping it against the mossy roots of an old tree. Twigs and stones and last year's beech-mast went to the making of it, and then they drew back a little along the path, so softly carpeted with husks, and admired their work. Unfortunately, as they thought, it had no shells, not even cockle-shells, and so it was not really a proper grotto like the ones which, summer by summer since they were tiny boys, they had constructed—they knew not why—on the pavements of the London streets. Nor were there any passers-by here, and thus it was useless to chant the time-honored formula: "A penny for the grotto!" Still, the miniature grotto looked very pretty when the sunshine filtered through the high leafy roof of the avenue and rested upon it. Maybe, they builded better than they knew! Maybe, St. James of Compostella was not without concern and pity for the ignorant descendants of those English who had once so loved and revered his shell-built shrine!

After the first Sunday, the days seemed to follow one another with merciless swiftness, until the last day came, followed by the last evening, the last morning. It had all gone by so quickly, yet London seemed worlds away. The wrench of parting from school and comrades was almost forgotten. Only now and again did the well-known figures of home claim attention, flitting across the backgrounds of their minds in a setting of far-off, misty, but familiar scenes. Bunny's House, on the contrary, was real—Bunny's House, with its low raftered ceilings and the salt smell from the creek. And always now, if they dreamed of the future, the substantial chimneys of Marraton and its hilly orchards formed part of the picture. Farmer Tredinnick, who had to work so hard in the absence of his son, was very real indeed, and his mistress, with the curvy mouth and eyebrows, even more so. For the time being, Ernest was more anxious about the success of her new spectacles from Plymouth (tested by proxy) than he was about the fate of poor little Sidney, his invalid brother. It was not that he was heartless, but he was impressionable, and with impressionable people the Present is so engrossing. He felt quite overcome when Mrs.

Tredinnick, in wishing the boys good-by, kissed them as though they had been small children and told them: "Now mind! if you ever want a holiday, you're more than welcome."

Miss Warfelton alone was rather elusive. She was so quiet, and her features so insignificant. She had indeed no peculiarity by which the boys could take hold of her, for she was neither strikingly unique of countenance like Mrs. Tredinnick, nor had she a stiff leg like the stout farmer, nor a shiny bald pate like her uncle the Squire. Yet she was kind and well-disposed towards them, and she it was who accompanied them to Plymouth to put them safely on their way.

Again they drove in Tredinnick's trap, calling at Marraton to pick up Miss Warfelton. The Squire was standing in the doorway. He wore a straw hat, a gray tweed jacket, and bright tan gaiters. He had a roll of papers in his left hand, for he was just starting off to one of his distant farms with estimates for the repair of roofs and gates. With his right he grasped a heavy oak stick.

"Good-by, Bunnies! Come again, little Bunnies!"

"Oh, please! Sir," cried Cyril.

"Even if it isn't our turn?" shouted Ernest.

"Turns come round again, sure as snails after rain," called the old gentleman after them. Then the bend in the drive hid him from view. That was a poignant moment for the departing guests.

Cyril gave Ernest a violent push.

"Don't! You'll have me out."

"Look at Harry, then. He's waving good-by."

Beyond the row of magnificent Spanish chestnuts, Harry was cutting the grass on the hill behind Marra-ton—it was the last field that remained to complete the hay harvest. He was seated on the cutting machine, upright and graceful, his clear tanned face smiling gravely beneath the shady sun hat, his white shirt open at the neck. Before him, the horses tugged obediently across the slope; behind, the grass fell with a swish. The unstudied ease of the slim, muscular figure, so youthful, so content, and so alert, would have appealed to a sculptor.

"Good-by, Harry!"

"Good-by, Cyril! Good-by, Ernie! Good luck to you!"

"Now you must please get out," interposed Miss

Warfelton, "and walk up the steepest part of the hill, because the four of us are rather heavy for the horse."

So they came to Saltash, and then to Plymouth, where Miss Warfelton put them into the London train.

CHAPTER II

"Shades of the Prison-house"

MR. GRILLS was justly angry. He had been bending over other people's watches all day in a dark, stuffy little back room, principally with the object of providing roof and clothes and bread and bacon for his family, and it was trying to the temper to come home and find no preparation whatever for a meal. Then and there, what little patience he possessed (and it was not much) he lost.

"Call this *home!*" he said. "And not even a kettle on the fire!" His chronic scowl deepened, his moustache drooped with intensified discontent, and he ruffled his stiff, gray hair with the back of his hand. He was really not a bad-looking man, of rather a military type of countenance, only his perpetual air of crossness spoilt him.

"Keep your hair on, Father!" retorted Mrs. Grills. "You'll be expecting me next to walk down the street

to meet you, with a cup of tea in one hand and a piece of bread-and-butter in the other. I'm only just in from the shopping."

"Well, I left the house before eight. You never think of going out to shop till it's about time for me to be coming back."

"For goodness' sake! get the frying-pan and put the eggs and bacon on. The only way to stop some people's chin-wag is to fill their mouths."

"The hen had been eating fish, that laid the egg you gave me yesterday," grumbled Mr. Grills.

"What's the harm if it had? You eat fish yourself sometimes."

"Where's Sidney?" he inquired suddenly.

"Lying down upstairs. He ain't well again."

"He's never well, that child. Where's Ernie, then?"

"Out somewhere with Cyril Sturt."

"Ain't he got a place yet, the young larrikins?"

"Ain't he got a place! You know very well he ain't got no place. Other boys' fathers find them places instead of letting them run the streets wearing out their clothes."

"Other boys' mothers find time to go round to the trades-people and speak to them about their sons."

"My Ernie ain't going to be no errand-boy. He wants to be an engineer."

"I'll 'engineer' him!"

"Don't take on so silly," Mrs. Grills exhorted him. She was fairly tall, fairly stout, fairly good-tempered, and she did not worry overmuch about anything. Her hair was generally coming down, her shoes had a tendency to drop off, her stockings wanted mending. Little things like this did not ruffle her. Her round face and wide-open light blue eyes made her look singularly young for her years, but she was quite capable of holding her own with her husband.

"And Emmy? Why don't she come in and get the tea? What's the good of daughters? I s'pose she's just wearing out shoe-leather, flap-flapping with some boy."

"I'm tired of telling you that she don't leave her place till eight."

"So she *says*," he remarked skeptically, giving the cat in his way a vicious kick.

"Don't mind him, my poor Black Moggie!" said

Mrs. Grills, stooping to caress the cat. "You want your tea same as him, and you shall have it first yet. Serves him right that his bacon's burning."

As soon as he had drunk his tea, Mr. Grills got up, and washed his hands with a resolute air at the scullery tap.

"Where are you off to now?" asked his wife. He did not very often go out again after he had once come home.

"I'm going out to see about a place for Ernie."

"What's the good at this hour! Everything's shut up."

"Turners work late on a Friday."

"Going right over there?"

"Well, why not? The trams are running if my legs give out."

"Stop a minute! I want some money off of you before you go."

"Oh, of course!" grumbled Mr. Grills. He was paid on a Friday, and invariably handed the weekly allowance to his wife on his return.

This week she said: "Must have a bit extra. Sidney's boots won't go on any longer by no manner of means."

"Workhouse!" shouted Mr. Grills in a loud angry voice. For all that, he laid an extra ten shilling note upon the table. "You're forever spending money on outsides," he complained. "I don't hold with it. It's our insides that want looking after. What are you getting for dinner on Sunday?"

"What d'you suppose the money'll run to?" she questioned scornfully. "Half an ox, I dare say."

Mr. Grills departed, giving the door a vicious slam.

When he returned he found his son Ernest sitting by the fire reading the *London Mail*.

"Putting all your fine scholarship to good use, I see," he remarked with icy sarcasm. "When I was your age I went up to the City on my own, and I knocked around at office doors till I got a good job. But of course we're too grand for that now—our old parents has to do that for us. Now, listen to me! You're to go along to Canonbury to-morrow to see Turners—you know, Turners, the corn merchant people. I've just been speaking to the foreman; the boss will be there at eleven, and I think he'll take you on."

"But I want to be an engineer, Father. I want to learn about electricity."

"You'll learn about corn and hay, then. What's the odds? Corn makes bread, and hay feeds horses—and horses come in useful when your motor spirit gives out and your bally electrical system breaks down. I don't hold with too much machinery."

"But—"

"Not another word! Eleven to-morrow at Turners! I can't have the place full of dumb lunatics eating the home up."

So saying, he laid the parcel he was carrying upon the table.

"What now?" queried Mrs. Grills.

"A bird for Sunday," he replied nonchalantly. "I must have something to eat. It's a fine fat 'un too."

"Decent sized family fowls was an awful price at Smithson's yesterday," remarked his wife.

"Oh, I dare say! But people must live."

"Workhouse!" she threw at him triumphantly.

Ernest went dejectedly to bed. There was no gas in the boys' room, so he took a candle with him. Ten-year-old Sydney was lying on his back gazing aimlessly at the ceiling, faintly illuminated by a distant street lamp. On a chair by the bed was a cup

of bread-and-milk and a plate of sausage. The bread-and-milk was Mrs. Grills's idea, the sausage was Sidney's, but he had been unable to touch either.

Ernest cleared the chair and sat down upon it, his candle in one hand, the *London Mail* in the other. "Look, Sid!" he said, holding the candle so that the light fell upon the page. "Isn't that a funny picture?"

"I think it's very stupid," replied Sidney. "I feel all groggy inside, an' it only makes me sicker an' sicker to look at horrid girls an' silly fellers."

"I'm sorry," said Ernest, and as he did not know what to do to comfort his little brother, he began to undress. On Sidney's better days, the boys had a good deal in common; but when he was suffering it was impossible to please him, and the small, pale, drawn face affected Ernest uncomfortably, and made him want to get beyond the range of the reproachful, haunting eyes. To-night he hastened to blow out the candle.

"Ernie," said the weak voice, "if I could only see some of the cool stars, I think it'd make my nasty hot head feel better."

The blind was almost half-way down. Ernest

pulled it up with a jerk as far as it would go, and Venus floated into sight.

"God's home, I s'pose," murmured Sidney. "It must be very cool an' comfy up there. Do you know, Ernie, when I'm growed up, I mean to learn all about God."

Certainly, Ernest could not tell his brother anything about God. Indeed, Sidney had the advantage of him there, for he had formed a slight acquaintance with a little girl who had a pious mother. The elder boy remained standing by the window, his eyes fixed upon the starry stretch of sky that showed above the chimney-pots. So had it looked, only much more of it, the night he knelt upon the window-seat in Bunny's House. Distant and still, behind all the sounds of the great city, he could detect the silence of the woods and fields. He began to talk to Sidney about Bunny's House.

"I s'pose there was a lot of bunnies there?"

"Not close there, but lots and lots in the fields. I got up once in the very early morning, and they were out of their holes and popping about everywhere, and the grass was all wet with dew."

"You never brought us any for pie."

"I never thought. Besides, I couldn't have caught them—no boy can run like rabbits. Of course, I might have asked Harry. Sometimes he went out before breakfast and shot some with his gun."

"Guess they're happier poppin' in an' out of their holes than shot an' in a pie, say?" murmured Sidney sleepily. Presently he added as an afterthought: "But I'm awful fond of rabbit pie."

Then he fell asleep.

Next morning Ernest went obediently to Turners of Canonbury and was engaged by Mr. John Turner, the senior partner, as an office boy. Thenceforward, a life of steady routine began for him.

For a time, at all events, he found it far from uninteresting. The firm was an old established one, with traditions. The Heads were proud of it; substantial men themselves, they liked everything in their business to be substantial. Employees were well paid, and their characters inquired into before they were permanently engaged. The office was comfortably furnished and well warmed. All the members of the indoor staff were given tea at four. There were men in the firm who had been there all their lives, notably the cashier, a touchy and inquisi-

tive old gentleman—"real nosey," as Ernest said. Mr. Eylett, the order clerk, a prim, stiff, upright young man who would have been in the Army except for a weak heart, had risen to his present enviable position from being first yard boy, and then office boy. Altogether, prospects were bright for Ernest, provided he worked well and kept steady. He used to reach the yard at eight, and help there during the morning, acting as intermediary between office and yard, and giving a hand wherever he was wanted. After dinner, he was employed almost entirely in the office, and he soon learnt to attend to the telephone, keep the stamp book, and dispatch the post. Since he wrote neatly and was good at arithmetic, he was presently entrusted with the duty of making out the monthly invoices. He left off work at half-past-six, went straight home for a hurried tea, and then, on four evenings in the week, attended shorthand and bookkeeping classes. As he earned fourteen shillings a week, and his mother took twelve shillings from him in return for lodging, food and clothes, he had not enough pocket money to get into serious mischief.

Most of the day, the whirr of the chaff-cutting

machine under the spacious loft at the bottom of the yard was in his ears. Ernest used to like to watch the hay sliding up and down the long trough, and the greedy knives on the alert to chop it. Once the engine exploded, and he made good use of the occasion, rushing across the yard and bursting into the inner office where two girl typists were at work. "They're over! They're over!" he shouted gleefully. The noise was certainly suggestive of an air-raid, and Miss Dulcie Weekes hastily left her machine to inquire over the telephone if certain trunk lines were engaged—a state of affairs that usually betokened mischief overhead. She was cross with Ernest for having disturbed her and made her flush up, but Miss Dennison, her junior, a flapper with hair down her back, thought it a very good joke. Ernest did not in his heart like air raids, and more than once he had secretly wondered how it was that Cyril Sturt could so evidently look upon them as a form of pleasurable excitement. He was not made that way, and when it dawned upon him that he was not, he felt aggrieved, as though an unkind fate had placed him at a disadvantage. At Turners, however, the idea of a raid was not altogether un-

pleasant, for Mr. John Turner had caused two solid hay dugouts to be constructed under the loft, and these would undoubtedly afford safe shelter except in the very remote contingency of a direct hit. The prospect of a thorough upset in the day's work, and the promised picnic meal at the firm's expense, could not fail to be attractive to a lad of Ernest's age.

Before his first year was out, Ernest had become so useful in the office that he was entirely employed there. He dressed more smartly, and began to give himself the airs of a junior clerk. He only went to the yard now for the purpose of taking messages; still, it remained for him a fascinating place. The wagons of hay and straw, the tame and active hens, and the occasional visits of unmistakable farmer folk, created in the midst of London the illusion of a corner of the country. Sometimes, the youth had lapses from his superior grown-up attitude, and one day, when the majority of the staff were at dinner, he slipped across and had a scrimmage with the yard boy, which ended in their amicably taking turns at jumping on and off a big heap of empty sacks. The dust flew out of the sacks in clouds, and very soon Ernest's blue serge suit was unrecognizable.

In this condition, he was caught and reprimanded by the old cashier—the cashier, who could never take a decent time over his dinner like other people, but must always be returning unexpectedly in order to go “nosing round.”

Ernest saw a good deal of the lady typists now. The telephone was in their room, and it was his duty to attend to it when they were busy. He also brought in their tea, which was made by the caretaker's wife, but he snatched his own at a standing desk in the outer office. Miss Dulcie Weekes was a very fashionable girl, and when the Heads of the firm were absent, she used the telephone to make innumerable appointments with gentlemen friends. Often, the obliging Ernest helped her: “Please, Grills, get me Mayfair 908 while I finish this letter,” she would say. There appeared to be no harm in her, however, and at least she did not flirt with any one in the office, whatever she may have done outside. Miss Dennison was a tomboy, not above tweeking Ernest's ear on occasion. He tried to keep her at a distance, as did most of the younger men in the office, for youth likes to be on its dignity. Only twice did Ernest forget himself and romp with her.

The second time they knocked over a chair and broke it.

One thing at Turners was to Ernest a source of intense annoyance. It chanced that there was a rough-looking carman who also bore the name of Grills. It may sound a small matter, but it irritated Ernest almost beyond endurance when Miss Weekes inquired teasingly: "Seen Father Grills to-day, Grills?" Others too teased him about "Father Grills." Strangers invariably concluded that carman Grills must be Ernest's father or uncle. When assured that he was no connection, they would remark reflectively: "Funny! it's not at all a common name, Grills." The mere mention of "Father Grills" made Ernest furious. He hated to have to speak to him, and would gladly have given a month's wages to get rid of the poor inoffensive old man.

So month after month went by, one day very like another, until Ernest had completed his first year at Turners, and then his second year. His wages had risen considerably, and, in addition, he had a substantial War bonus, so although by the time he was sixteen he gave his mother more money and had taken to

buying his own clothes, he was really quite prosperous. He began to frequent music halls and cinemas, and he walked out with a "young lady." He also read a fair number of books, mostly of the crude and "risky" type recommended to him by Miss Dulcie Weekes—his own young lady was not literary. Sometimes in the office he would glance over the *Daily Telegraph*, and he bought the *News of the World* on Sunday, but he did not really take much interest in public affairs, nor in the cruel and gigantic struggle which was being fought out in France and Flanders. Life to him was just Turners, a few hours of recreation, and bed. His father used frequently to tell him complacently that if only he behaved himself he was fixed up for life; and when he looked into the future, which was not often, he always saw himself in the corn merchants' office, gray-headed, respectable and prosperous, engaged in faithfully performing the duties that filled up the ten hour day, but free to lengthen out the dinner-hour, when he so willed, without untoward results. Oh! and he supposed he should be having a home of his own some day. He took this as a matter of course, but

felt no enthusiasm about it. Some girls were very amusing, and it was nice to walk about with them, but most people seemed to him to find married life rather a bore.

CHAPTER III

“The Eternal Silence”

ZEPPELINS had been succeeded by Gothas, and on the whole Mr. Grills senior found them more nerve-racking. Still, the system of warnings that had been instituted enabled him to take precautions. He would get out the large shallow bath which did duty on Saturday nights in the absence of a bathroom, and place it upon two chairs in the scullery, squatting underneath as under a gigantic shrapnel helmet. This amused his wife hugely. She often said it was a good thing that there was not a raid every night or she should soon be ill from laughing. “Get along under your shelter, the old Count’s after you,” was her cry in the earlier period. Long after the “old Count’s” day was over, she used to threaten her husband with him. Indeed, in her eyes, Count Zeppelin was so entertaining, so comical, so grotesque a personage, that subsequently she could not easily bring herself to believe in his

death. "They do say that the old Count has turned up his toes," she remarked, "but I really don't feel at all sure about it myself. Is it likely? The old sinner!"

One clear mild night in February towards ten o'clock, Emmy came hurrying home. She had been out for a walk with Algy, her young man, and a kindly old woman, seeing the couple dallying under a darkened street lamp, had advised them to get along in, because a policeman had just told her that "them things was about."

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Mrs. Grills, "and I left all my week's washing out because it wasn't freezing!"

"I'll give you a hand," volunteered Algy, and he went into the back yard with her. The two re-appeared, their arms full of damp clothes, just as the maroons went off.

Ernest too was on his way home, and he quickened his step when he heard the signals. He found the whole family assembled in the kitchen. His mother was laying the cloth, for she always provided an extra meal on these occasions, "As we can't sleep, we'd best be keeping up our systems," she said.

Emmy and Algy were sitting side by side—he, fair, stolid, and stumpy; she, with dark hair, big, dark, cow-like eyes and a high complexion—a curious contrast to Ernest. Sidney was in an armchair by the fire, wrapped in a blanket. He had not grown stronger with the passage of time; the most which could be said was that he was not appreciably worse. He attended school off and on, ate all kinds of unwholesome things when he had an appetite, and then would be sick for days and unable to take anything.

“Here, Ernie! get some more coal in and make up a good fire,” cried Mrs. Grills, as her elder son entered. “Three hours of it is the least we may expect.”

Her husband was standing by the window, his hair ruffled and his eyes wild. Very cautiously, he drew back the blind an inch or two, and peeped apprehensively at the sky.

“I’d take care if I was you,” commented his wife. “The old Count might see you.”

The distant barrage began. “Now then, off to your dugout!” she said.

He hesitated a moment. “Why don’t *you* get under the table with the child?” he suggested.

"I dare say! And where would we be if the roof came in on us?"

He went off to the scullery, and the next moment they heard him dragging out the bath.

The nearer guns came into play, and the barrage roared all round them. Through the noise of the guns, from time to time, they could hear the dull, heavy explosion of a bomb.

"Think we shall be killed to-night, Ernie?" asked Sidney.

"Oh, no," said Ernest reassuringly, struck with pity at the sight of the child's drawn white face and terror-haunted eyes. Emmy and Algy sat on quietly side by side, speechless, but glad to be together. Ernest, outwardly calm, had a queer, churned-up feeling within him, and in spite of himself his hand shook as he filled the kettle.

"Fill Sookey right up," said his mother. "Trust your father to want plenty of coffee in' his dug-out!"

A reverberating explosion. The house rocked, and then came the crash of falling glass. For a moment their hearts stood still. Then: "That was a near 'un," said Algy. "It's broke our windows."

Suddenly Ernest noticed Sidney. He had rolled over, his eyes were glassy and his face twitching.

"The brutes!" exclaimed Mrs. Grills. "They've given my child a fit."

All was in confusion. Mr. Grills came out from his dugout to proffer advice that was not taken. Algy occupied himself in clearing the floor of broken glass. "He's awful bad," murmured Emmy, as she helped her mother to lay the boy where the cold night air from the broken window blew in on him. Warnings as to avoiding doors and windows were forgotten in their anxiety.

"I'll go for the doctor," said Ernest.

"No, no!" exclaimed his mother. "You'd never get him in the middle of all this, and you might be killed yourself."

"I'll get him," said Ernest. He felt no fear of the bombs any more. He was much more afraid of Sidney than of the bombs.

No sooner had he opened the door than he came upon Mrs. O'Grady—a solitary old Irishwoman who lived in a bed-sittingroom in the house next his home. Except to pass the time of day, Ernest had never had anything to do with her. To him, she

was a quaint old body talking a queer dialect and wearing a shawl over her head—almost a foreigner. To-night, she was standing at the open street door, her eyes fixed with tragic indignation upon the flashing sky. There was the drone of a Gotha overhead, and she raised her clenched fist and shook it violently:

“Wait a bit, me boys! You’ll come a step too far one day. God has His eye on you.” The words rang out with intense conviction—the conviction of a race that has never lost its grip on the realities.

“If only He had, Mrs. O’Grady!” cried the rudderless Ernest. “If only He had! Our Sidney’s dying.”

“The blessed lamb!” she murmured, her voice suddenly quite gentle. “But God and His Holy Mother will protect him.”

The words comforted Ernest. Without entering into their meaning, he looked upon them as a good omen.

He started off at a run, but soon he was brought to a halt by a cordon of special constables drawn across the street where the bomb had fallen. He had in consequence to make a considerable *détour*, and then of course he found the doctor out. All the doctors in the

neighborhood were out that night. It was morning before medical aid could be procured, and then Sidney was ordered away to the hospital. One epileptic seizure had followed another, and the little boy was in a critical condition.

Sidney lingered on some weeks. His frail constitution, already undermined by a form of chronic peritonitis, could not withstand the further strain of epilepsy. Doubtless, it was as well. Doubtless, those of the Unfit who are early relieved from the struggle are blessed above their fellow sufferers. But parents, even those who see no further than this earth, rarely look at things like that. Thank God! they are not philosophers, they are not utilitarians, when they love a child. So, day by day, Mrs. Grills went tearfully to visit Sidney on the Danger List. She had been too optimistic, too careless, ever to realize how insecure was his hold on life. He was her Benjamin, and she had loved to spoil him, often indeed injuring him by her indulgence. Was it likely that a boy who only a week ago had eaten half a cocoanut at a sitting, would not in the end have grown up strong? Surely, it was unnatural that the child whom she had named after a fight (the Sidney Street fray in the East End),

should possess such small power of resistance? And Mr. Grills, who had taken her view of things, and had left everything connected with the child to her, grew ever more morose and snappy, working late of an evening because he was afraid of what he might hear when he reached home. He, too, in his way, cared for Sidney. Unhesitatingly, had circumstances called for it, he would have come from under the shelter of his bath and walked through a raid to visit his dying boy.

Every Sunday, during those weeks of anxiety and of gloom, Ernest paid a visit to the hospital. Each time, Sidney seemed more unnatural to him. Sometimes the child lay with his eyes closed, too languid to take an interest in anything. Mrs. Grills, who even now would not believe the worst, looked forward with a wavering hope to the day when she should have her boy under her care again, but Ernest was secretly relieved that he was safe in hospital. He was vaguely ashamed of the feeling, yet the busy, capable nurses inspired him with a confidence he did not possess in his mother; and it was a comfort to know that his strangely altered brother was in the

charge of people who always did the right thing, and who were incapable of being flurried or upset.

There came a Sunday when Sidney lay unconscious, breathing heavily. Ernest and his mother sat by the bedside a long time. On a table near stood the basket of useless grapes which they had brought with them. He realized that this was the end, that for all practical purposes his little brother was already far away, and that he could never more enter into communication with him. This, then, was death. Screens were round the bed, and everything seemed orderly and natural, and yet so horribly and cruelly final. He dared not look at his mother, who was crying, but with an effort he tried to divert his own mind from a too painful dwelling on the past, more especially from the scorching memory of the pocket-knife he had promised Sidney and had then delayed to buy. Why had he often let the days go past without taking any notice of his small brother? Why had he been impatient with him? But presently a nurse entered and spoke in a low tone to Mrs. Grills.

"Come, Ernie," said his mother. "We'd best go home. It won't be to-night."

Just then Sidney opened his eyes, and for a moment they rested upon Ernest's face with a flicker of pleased recognition.

"Good old Ernie!" he murmured.

Ernest tried to say "Good-night, old chap," in a cheery, natural voice but his lips refused to make a sound, and he stooped and kissed the white face.

He never saw his brother alive again.

But he saw him after death, with a look of almost ecstatic peace upon his face, and the lines caused by ill-health and suffering smoothed away. He lay with his hands folded and flowers at his feet—a little figure to be regarded indeed with awe, and yet more truly Sidney than the boy with the drawn features who had breathed with difficulty. Until the coffin was nailed down, Ernest almost felt that he had got Sidney back. He went through the funeral as in a dream, not taking in at all the words of the burial service, and with a dumb resentment at the rattle of the earth upon the coffin lid. But, as the party left the cemetery, he noticed on many of the gravestones the letters "*R. I. P.*," and, shyly, he watched his opportunity, and asked the undertaker's man what

they meant. "They mean, 'Rest in Peace,' " he was told.

To rest in peace! Yes, that seemed to Ernest a good description of death. He had no doubt that Sidney was somehow resting in peace. He looked so happy after he had died, and even before death he had seemed happy, and he had smiled when he had said, "Good old Ernie." Ernest had no clear ideas about immortality. He had been accustomed to think of death, when he thought of it at all, as the end of everything, but he did not feel that it had been the end of Sidney. Dim memories of a conventional Heaven came to be associated in his mind with the child. But he felt that such a place was not for him.

Still, his conviction—or, rather, his sentiment—that all was well with Sidney, did not prevent him from speaking rather snappishly to Mrs. O'Grady the next time he met her. He considered that she had "let him down" by telling him so confidently that Sidney would be protected.

"You see, my brother did die," he said reproachfully.

The old woman gave him a pitying look. "Heaven be his bed this night!" she muttered devoutly. "But he's better off than we are. May he rest in peace!"

Thus did Ernest learn the classic prayer that spans the gulf between the living and the dead.

The evening after the funeral, Cyril Sturt called to invite Ernest to the cinema. Principally out of awkwardness, the lad had kept away while trouble was about, but he was not without sympathy for his friend, and he now desired to help him to a little distraction. He also felt he needed it himself, for he had just lost an elder brother at the Front. Cyril's was not a very personal grief, for this brother had been a good deal older than he was, and married, and therefore had not lived at home for some time. Still, Cyril was conscious that he ought to be "cut up," and he did really experience sincere regret.

"I'm very sorry about Sidney," he said, "and have you heard? I've lost my brother Bob, too. You'd better come with me to the Pictures—we both want bucking up."

Cyril was now a grocer's assistant. He had grown, but his face was just as boyish. His eyes

had their old insolent, defiant look, but he was not an unfaithful friend.

To-night, he manifested his sympathy for Ernest by insisting upon treating him. He took him to the most "classy" of the three Picture Palaces in the vicinity, and paid for the best seats. Unluckily, by very reason of its superiority, this particular cinema did not present so many comic films. Instead, they saw the "Battle of the Somme."

The two boys found it a lugubrious entertainment. Cyril could not help thinking of his dead brother. Ernest was both fascinated and repelled. At last Cyril remarked gloomily:

"We shall be in that some day, Ernie. The War's not going to be over for years and years. Mark my words! we'll have to go."

"I'm sure there's enough death and wretchedness in the world without men starting out to try and kill and cripple each other on purpose," said Ernest.

"It's senseless," declared Cyril.

"But I suppose it's fine to be brave," reflected Ernest, who realized that in his own case courage was a quality which demanded an effort.

"It's senseless," repeated Cyril, who had little

imagination, and no fear at all of man or devil.

The audience broke into a cheer. And Ernest looked again at the picture soldiers as they went noiselessly about their duty amid the silent shells. Not for themselves did they do it. It occurred to him that "senseless" was not quite the right word.

CHAPTER IV

"The Noisy Years"

ABOUT this time, Ernest took to walking out with Cyril's sister Maud. She was not particularly good-looking, but she had a vivacious, changing face. Most of the lads of Ernest's age had a "girl," who hardly ever turned out to be the girl they ultimately married, and it was natural that he should fall in with the custom. It was pleasant, of course, to have Maud to take out, but it was also expensive, for she was a young person of spirit who liked to have a good time. At first she was contented with a quiet ride on the top of a tram, but very soon it transpired that she preferred theaters and music halls and cinemas. She also needed a good deal of refreshment. She liked to be munching chocolates, even at four shillings a pound. When ices were not to be procured, some substitute had to be discovered. Then there were presents. Of course, young men have to give their girls presents—

gloves and brooches and little things of that kind. Once, Ernest rose to a fur. In return for all this he obtained companionship, and the *kudos* of being seen at public entertainments with a quite presentable girl. She chattered to him interminably, using all the slang expressions of the day, teased him until he sulked, and then won him over again by saying penitently: "Stupid Old Thing!—I didn't mean it." She it was who induced him to read Elinor Glyn's novels. She was, as he said, "some girl." It was all rather amusing, and of course it meant nothing, since neither boy nor girl as yet contemplated lasting partnership for the serious business of life. This much at least Maud's presence did for Ernest: it saved him from the approach of other women, unscrupulous, and far more dangerous.

If the friendship with Maud was expensive, the friendship with her brother was scarcely less so. Even after he had almost forgotten his bereavement, Cyril still found that he needed distracting and "bucking up." He it was who initiated Ernest into a process which he termed "going West." The lads would don their smartest clothes and go and dine in some West End restaurant. Ernest would often

wash his hair and then oil it before he started. Cyril used face cream with a view to improving his unhealthy complexion. They came to think ten shillings a very moderate sum to spend upon a dinner, and they learned the taste of different wines. Fascinated, they would gaze at the giddy young officers and at the often extraordinary womankind who peopled these haunts, but that was all. They never spoke to any of these brilliant personages: they dared not risk a snub. They mostly sat there in their shy, raw youth, observant strangers from another sphere.

The Grills family had never been accustomed to attend any place of worship regularly, but, at Maud's suggestion, she and Ernest would occasionally go to service somewhere on a wet Sunday evening. As the evenings grew darker, they did this more often. At first they only regarded church or chapel, as the case might be, as a welcome alternative to tramping the streets, but as time went on, Ernest came to take a certain interest in the proceedings. They wandered indifferently from High Church to Low Church, from the Baptists to the Congregationalists, enjoying the singing when it was hearty, and picking up from the

sermons a few theological phrases and an odd selection of disconnected ideas. It was indeed all disconnected, all nebulous to them, since at the back of their minds was no framework into which they could fit what they heard. To the prayers they never attended unless they were delivered *extempore*, and then Ernest usually spoke of them afterwards disapprovingly as "rants." Once they strayed into a Salvation Army barracks, but they never ventured there again, because the discourse threatened to become dangerously personal. It was really remarkable how they managed to keep *outside* everything religious, Ernest in particular maintaining a condescendingly impartial and—as he imagined—broad-minded attitude. The Name of Christ became familiar to them, but it never struck them that He was a real Person to be reckoned with here and now. Religion was to them merely a respectable way of spending Sunday evening: they did not connect it with the rest of the week, still less did they look to it to throw any light upon the problem of whence they came or whither they were bound. Yet, even had they done so, it would not have been easy to sort out any definite truths from the mass of conflicting

statements that reached their ears. Perhaps it was only natural that Ernest, nodding his head wisely, should decide that one theory was as good as another. "After all, it's what a man *does* that matters," he told Maud. "I don't hold with Confession," he announced with prompt decision after hearing a High Church sermon on that subject. "Speaks sensible," he murmured approvingly, when a vicar with Protestant views explained Holy Communion to his congregation as a purely commemorative and symbolic act. To-day, as nineteen hundred years ago, human nature is impatient of "hard sayings."

Once they went to a Catholic church, but Ernest did not understand what was going on. He felt "out of it," and to this he had an instinctive dislike, bred of a certain obstinate, though not very strong-minded pride. The Altar, the candles, the white-robed boys who came and went with orderly precision in the well-lit sanctuary, the monotonous repetition of the Rosary, whose words he did not catch, seemed to him just a show. It so chanced that, owing to the sudden illness of the priest, there was no sermon that evening, and they never went again, for Catholicism was the one form of religion which inspired Maud with a kind

of nervous distrust. One thing, however, Ernest noticed—that men, especially men in khaki, were more numerous there than in the other churches he had visited. A little to the left of him, a kneeling Highlander was gravely busy in a world of which Ernest knew nothing at all. How should he have known? He came away with the impression that Catholicism was an odd religion, but that at any rate it was a man's religion. And perhaps this was enough. Education is a lengthy process. It is generally only possible to take a very short step at a time, and many such are needed to lead up to a fresh point of view.

Not every Sunday evening did Ernest spend with Maud, and on the days when she was otherwise engaged, he would sometimes take a walk with his father to Finsbury Park or Hyde Park. Mr. Grills was an intelligent man, with a certain quick, shrewd faculty of judgment which his son had inherited, although in Ernest as yet it was only just beginning to develop. Father and son used to wander round the various platforms, and listen to the speakers as each presented his own solution of the riddle of existence. And Mr. Grills, on whom the riddle did not greatly press, was vastly entertained—the changing

views, the earnestness or flippancy, the irritable or good-humored heckling of the crowd, the swift and vigorous repartee, all combined to form for him a sort of mental Picture Show, flitting across his inner field of vision as the films flitted across his outer. But Ernest, more serious at bottom than his father, left the Park more than once the prey to an attack of weary exasperation. He still held to his conviction that there was good in all—the practical and coldly destructive rationalist; the spiritualist exploiting the unhealthy attraction of the occult; the enthusiastic devotee of Christian Science, or one or another fashionable fancy cult, with his inflated language and soaring superiority; the Socialist who drew for men the outlines of an Earthly Paradise which even Ernest's boyish eyes could see to be impossible; the Salvationist who bade them fix their hopes upon the further shore of the "Beautiful River." Yes, all were good. One had only to pick and choose. But was it worth while to pick and choose?

Evidently, these men thought it was. There was the Salvation Army Captain, for instance, who asked Ernest if he were saved. Ernest did not laugh as Cyril would have done, but he turned aside hastily.

Strong feeling made him uncomfortable, and there was strong feeling in the eyes that met his, and in the voice that said: "But Christ died for you, brother." Ernest got away, yet afterwards he remembered the real interest and affection in the eyes of the little captain. He felt safer and more at home with the Catholic lecturer—"R-r-roman Catholic," as a persistent heckler maintained. Ernest used to push up quite close to his notice board, which bore the inscription, "Truth is Freedom." Both he and his father greatly appreciated this lecturer, who was never at a loss for an answer, and never out of temper. He was not above a laugh too, even against himself, although he spoke with deep conviction. He told them to examine into his points themselves and see if they were true. "For after all," he said one day, "truth is necessary in life, and to him who obtains truth, freedom also comes—freedom from 'self' and from private opinion." Gradually, there glimmered across Ernest's mind a faint idea of objective truth. Picking and choosing could only be worth while if it were possible to pick out what was true. But he did not follow up this line of thought. Immersed in the present, nothing prompted him to be a seeker.

The present indeed was sufficiently engrossing. Now that he had risen in the firm, its business came to occupy a larger place in his thoughts. It was really quite interesting to hold conversations over the telephone, to struggle to get promises fulfilled and goods delivered in time, and occasionally to visit the docks when a ship was being unloaded. For the most part, however, Ernest's work kept him close to his desk all day long. Fortunately, he had the society of his fellow workers. He was good-natured and popular, taking quite an interest in the patriotic song which Mr. Eylett had written for the Halls, and in the wheelbarrow which the cashier was making for his grandchildren; and if he sometimes sparred with the flapper who acted as assistant to Miss Weekes, he treated Miss Weekes herself with an obliging respect that won her unstinted approval. Once she even went so far as to bring him a present in return for the innumerable little good offices he rendered her. The gift took the form of a most artistic tie, and Ernest felt highly flattered. Really, he hardly knew how to thank her; however, he accepted it with a gratified and appreciative air, remarking graciously: "Oh! Miss Weekes, how could

you be so silly!" There was no doubt that Ernest showed every promise of turning out a success, nor did he lack the sense to perceive that his lines were cast in fairly pleasant places, although he remained rather susceptible on the subject of "Father Grills."

And yet, in what a mental turmoil did Ernest spend those early years! Looking back afterwards, he thought of them chiefly as a confusion of voices—the clamorous voices of the music halls, the churches, and the parks; the quieter but no less conflicting voices of novels and of the daily Press. Then there were the voices of his parents and his friends, and of Maud and her friends; and, for ten hours a day, the voices at the office—raised in argument or in rough banter when the Heads were out of the way, whispering when they were known to be at hand, calling to him insistently from the telephone. What a medley of voices! What a riot of sound! And yet, among them all, there was no dominant note that rose above the others, no recurring phrase that brought a little unity and coherence into his life, before Mr. Jack came.

CHAPTER V

“Custom . . . Heavy as Frost”

WHEN first the frost sets in, the ground is only slightly hard in the early morning. Very soon the warmth of the sun thaws it, and then the grass is all a-sparkle with diamonds, and the little worms wriggle up to the surface through the soft earth. But, day by day, if the frost holds, the ground becomes harder, until it reverberates beneath the blows of horses' hoofs, and no living thing that has its home below the surface can force its way upwards through the frozen crust. Day by day too, that crust grows thicker, and, as the frost bites further and further into the soil, underground life is driven deeper down.

So it often is with men and women. As children, they open wide their eyes and look out into the world and find all fresh and interesting. It lies before them, an enchanted country of great distances, where they may wander and do what they will, except in so

far as restrained by the hand of Authority. People press upon them—the older people who have charge of them—but facts do not; and so they enjoy a wonderful freedom of spirit, for the tyranny of persons is not to be compared with the tyranny of circumstances. To little Hans Anderson, the single room where he lived with his mother and his cobbler-father was a world populated with the most wonderful beings; the flower-pot garden on the roof was another. But he was a poet, and never lost his freshness of outlook, his sense of wonder. Most men do. Gradually, as they grow up, they find they cannot be what they would, go where they will. They settle down to the drab business of life, until they lose their zest for strange fresh things, even those they might legitimately grasp. And the weight of custom presses upon them, “heavy as frost, and deep almost as life,” until only now and again, as from an infinite depth below the frozen surface, do they catch the whisper of the old hopes and aspirations of their hearts. And this is age. But there are ways of escape from it.

Earlier than many, Ernest was succumbing to the weight of custom, although he was not conscious of it,

so gradual and insidious was the pressure. Brick and mortar walled him in. He lived with others whose conditions were exactly like his own, and whose outlook was naturally his; and he saw nothing, heard nothing, read nothing, to lift him out of his cramping environment and give him an occasional glimpse of the wider world beyond. A streak of timid vanity made him all too ready to run with the herd; he liked to be "the thing," and for all his exterior defensive obstinacy, he quailed inwardly under adverse criticism. Notwithstanding his conceit, he feared ridicule. He had not enough self-confidence to think independently. Poor Ernest! And yet, perhaps, this description hardly does him justice. He was honest. He was kindly. On the whole, the upright will was there, and God had kept him pure.

Lieutenant Jack Turner came into the restricted circle of his existence like a breath of East wind on a sultry day. He had been wounded on the Western Front, and the period of convalescence was a long one. When Ernest first saw him, there was no sign of suffering about him visible to the casual observer beyond the broad blue band around his sleeve. He was a big, cheery, fresh-looking young fellow, with

small, light blue, humorous eyes, and fair hair cropped as close to his head as possible. He used to like to sit on a high stool in the outer office, swinging his long legs, and watching every one in turn with that swift, interested, comprehending glance of his. It amused him to come to his father's place of business and chat with the men, some of whom remembered him in knickerbockers. And they, on their side, welcomed his disturbing presence. It did not matter if they talked a little loudly, or got behind with their books, when "Mr. Jack" was by. The Head of the firm was disposed to wink at a good deal where his youngest son was concerned.

Ernest could never quite remember how the intimacy with Mr. Jack sprang up. Perhaps it was natural that the youth of twenty should gravitate towards the youth of sixteen, although one was a capitalist lieutenant and the other an office boy. Probably the telephone had something to do with it. Ernest was always ready to get numbers; the Lieutenant was flattered by his prompt and admiring service. In this he resembled Miss Weekes. But Ernest thought more of his brief "Thanks," than of the young lady's effusive, "Thank you very much." Nor did Mr.

Jack give him a tie—indeed, he criticized the shot silk tie which was the gift of Miss Weekes, inquiring quizzically where such very magnificent confections were to be bought. “I want to know, Grills, really I do,” he said. By this time the youths were on so friendly a footing that Ernest was not offended, but only perplexed. As he never saw Mr. Jack in civilian clothes, he could not study that gentleman’s ties; but by looking carefully at the sort of thing worn by any young man he happened to meet who appeared to him at all to approximate the Lieutenant in style, his own neckwear soon became quite unnoticeable. From this he extended his attention to collars, and thence to hair, jackets, and boots. Presently he went about the world looking, comparing, judging. It was as good as a lesson in Pelmanism. “Why not be comfortable?” said Mr. Jack. “Why not have what you like? It’s you who have to wear the things, not other people. If other people don’t like them, they needn’t look at you.”

They went out to lunch together. Now there were three restaurants of the tea-shop type within practicable distance where, in Ernest’s opinion, self-respecting men drawing his scale of salary and with an

appearance to keep up might safely go. He was surprised when Mr Jack dived into the back parlor of a modest "pub." "We can come out if there's nothing decent," he said. But a cut from the joint, two vegetables, bread and cheese and stout, proved after all a very satisfactory meal. Ernest felt happier and sleepier during the afternoon than he had done for a long time.

The friendship grew. It diverted Mr. Jack to educate Ernest, and besides, he genuinely liked him. His platoon experience had taught him a good deal about young men of Ernest's class, and he had come to respect the sterling qualities displayed by many of them. The comradeship of the Army, the close proximity of death, the courageous facing of danger in common, had done their widening work. So in his banter there was nothing scornful. Nor was he condescending, otherwise there could have been no friendship. Each gave something to the other. Confidences were mutual.

The Lieutenant told Ernest that he hated business—that he was going to be an artist—that his father had kicked at first, but was now reconciled. He added that money was nothing, except, of course,

that one must have enough of it to get along—easy philosophy of one who, from childhood upwards, had never known what it was to want for anything of moment. But he did not try to turn Ernest from a commercial career; on the contrary, he spoke of his father's business with pride, and looked forward to the time when his new chum should attain a superior and lucrative position in the firm.

"And then, I suppose, you'll marry Maud," he remarked.

Ernest was startled. He had thought so little about Maud of late. He pointed out that he did not consider himself engaged to her, but only "engaged to walk out."

"I see," said Mr. Jack.

For Ernest too had talked, though not very discursively. Still, he had given brief details of Maud and of his home. And he had told his friend about Sidney's death. "Poor little chap!" said the Lieutenant, who had seen men die. "But cheerio! Grills."

They discussed literature, and Mr. Jack was not afraid to describe the type of book which Ernest patronized as "footling." He gave Ernest a tattered

pocket edition of Elizabeth Robins's "Magnetic North." The frozen world of hardship and adventure, the faulty yet enduring heroes, opened out new and nobler vistas to Ernest. Even the Jesuits were not like the Jesuits in popular Protestant fiction. He wondered hopelessly which view of them was the correct one.

"Well," said Lieutenant Turner reflectively, "I knew a Jesuit chaplain at the Front—a jolly decent fellow."

That seemed to Ernest to settle the question.

When he had finished "The Magnetic North," the Lieutenant introduced him to Stevenson, Dickens, and Scott. He even read and enjoyed Mr. Conrad's "Typhoon," but here he needed a little help to enable him to appreciate the subtler charm.

Then there were picture galleries—of course! for was not painting Mr. Jack's especial form of Art? But with regard to pictures Ernest proved refractory. Nothing could bring him to admire many of the Old Masters. "I don't like her—no, I don't!" he repeated with emphasis, as they stood before a quaint and stiff Madonna on a Saturday afternoon. "And the Baby's just a little doll," he added, with

a half-nervous laugh, conscious that he might be saying something quite absurd.

Still, he criticized—he, a raw, Cockney youth, criticized the great Masters of all time, and in spite of his ignorance, Jack enjoyed his companionship. At least, Ernest had not exchanged one convention for another. He did not, with glib artificial phrases, voice an admiration which he could not feel. For custom had ceased to press so heavily upon him; his own individuality was springing up through the crack which friendship had made in the frozen surface. He had begun to look for himself, to judge for himself—quite wrongly often, utterly uncultured as he was, and yet. . . . “A poor thing, but his own.”

Once, indeed, he surprised the Lieutenant. They had gone on Sunday to see some water colors and Ernest halted before a certain landscape, while a curious expression of longing and of pleasure stole across his face. “It reminds me of all kinds of things,” he said, as he gazed with melancholy delight at the bit of solitary bog road. It was not, in truth, very like anything that he had ever seen, but here at least was something which he could understand. Lamentably ignorant as he was of all things Christian, the

very subjects of many Christian pictures puzzled him; but he had had experience of the lonely stillness of the country, of the bare sweep of a field under a vast expanse of darkening sky, of the solitary swish of the branches of a tree in the wind. For him, all country had for its center Bunny's House. And his boyhood came back to him now, together with a great longing to see Bunny's House and Marraton again. How far away from London they were! But why had he never gone back, never kept his promise of corresponding with Mrs. Tredinnick? He began to tell Mr. Jack about Bunny's House, and about the creek and the orchards and the marsh, and Marraton.

"A glorious life," commented Lieutenant Turner. "I wonder you ever came away."

"But I couldn't be a farm hand!" cried Ernest.

CHAPTER VI

“The Faith That Looks through Death”

“DON’T you ever get time off?” Lieutenant Turner asked Ernest one day. “Other people do, it seems. Miss Weekes went to have a tooth out the day before yesterday—that’s the second time within my knowledge. If Miss Weekes, why not you? Ask for a morning just for once and come with me to the Italian Requiem.”

“I have a tooth wants coming out,” reflected Ernest. “It aches every time I get a bit of cold.”

“There’s luck for you!” ejaculated his friend.

Ernest had never been in Westminster Cathedral before—had never, indeed, seen a building so spacious and so suggestive of space. It was already full when they reached it, but a friend of the Lieutenant’s took them up into a gallery whence they could look down upon the great congregation. The morning was a dull one, and the yellowish brown of the undecorated brick took on a fictitious hue of age.

The noble proportions, the imposing height of the big round arches rising above the arch within arch of the side chapels, produced an impression of extraordinary space and distance. Jack Turner had not thought that any modern building could give him such a thrill. And the people gathered together in it deepened the effect. They were drawn from all classes and many nationalities—here, were the representatives of royalty and governments; and there, were working men and women, and even groups of slum children. It was these last, perhaps, who moved and prayed most naturally, with the ease of those at home. Ladies in mantillas, Sisters of St. Vincent de Paul with flapping *coiffes*, wounded soldiers on crutches, were mingled with scholars and men of international repute, many of whose faces Jack recognized. And on all sides were uniforms—khaki predominating, varied by the curious gray green of the Italians, the horizon blue of the French, and others less familiar still. The symbolic catafalque, draped in the Italian colors, was guarded by Carabinieri, who stood rigid and motionless as picturesque statues. In the gallery at the west end their world-famed band was playing.

"What's it for?" whispered Ernest, awed, as he looked down on the catafalque and the Carabinieri and the great yellow wax candles topped by tongues of flame.

Before the Lieutenant could explain, the band began to play the Italian National Anthem, followed by that of England as King George's representative entered. Then a hush fell, and the Mass commenced.

The music was Anerio's—piercingly sad, and yet majestic. To Jack Turner, with his artistic sense, it seemed the perfect worship, the perfect intercession; but to Ernest, at the time, it was just a dreary wail. Afterwards, however, vague memories of it sometimes made other music sound inadequate.

They stood most of the time, kneeling naturally enough with the adoring crowd when the trumpets sounded the salute at the Elevation. When all was over, the band of the Carabinieri played Chopin's Funeral March. It took the second movement at a superb swing, and this, together with the penetrating, reedy tone of the instruments, conjured up for Jack a vision of the Polish Legions, galloping over the many battlefields of Europe, and falling, falling. It was inexpressibly melancholy and unearthly, and

yet exhilarating, like their traditional cry: "Poland has not perished!"

"Splendid!" he said to Ernest, and Ernest nodded, for empty as was the storehouse of his mind, the accents of this music affected even him.

When most of the crowd had dispersed, the lads went down and wandered across the cathedral, glancing on their way at the front rows of chairs ticketed with so many well-known names.

And so they came to the Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament, where people still knelt in prayer. Ernest stumbled over the legs of a big airman in khaki. "Sorry!" he murmured, but the soldier did not raise his head from his arms.

Then he paused. Before the fresco of Joan of Arc stood a French Zouave, his arms stretched out in prayer. Ernest was amazed at the sight of this unusual figure,—the baggy red trousers, the short blue jacket, the bronze profile resembling that on an ancient Roman coin. He had never seen any one pray with outstretched arms before, never seen anything like the fixed, intense gaze of those steady brown eyes.

Once they were in the street again, the Lieutenant asked:

"What do you think of it all?"

Ernest pondered. "It's—it's queer," he said.

"It doesn't seem queer to me. There are so many dead now, Grills, such lots of dead, and it seems natural to keep in touch with them, to try to do something for them. They're out of sight, but they must be somewhere after all. When I'm dead, I would rather have people pray for me than go grousing around."

They walked slowly along Ashley Place. Presently, Mr. Jack said:

"Next time, you know, I don't think I shall come back."

Visibly, Ernest quailed. He said nothing, but something inside him seemed to sink.

"You see," the quiet voice went on, "we've so many chances against us, we second lieutenants. And then, somehow, I've a feeling. It may be nothing—I dare say I'll come through all right in spite of it. Still, it's there. Don't think I'm in a funk—I don't mind, really, as long as I'm not disabled. I

shan't be properly dead, you know, I couldn't be. I feel so awfully alive. And I shall always be alive. I shall only be somewhere else, doing something else—better things than down here, I expect, though of course it's quite jolly and interesting down here."

He paused, and then continued: "I wonder when the Victory will come—if it doesn't hurry up, you'll have to go. It's really rather wonderful over there, you know, and France is a wonderful country. I've seen little churches close behind the lines, and big churches too, and they were always full of people praying. Rich and poor, it was all the same. I've never seen anything like it."

A silence fell between them. Instinctively, so that it might not be troubled by the noise of a great thoroughfare, they turned and paced once more the length of Ashley Place. Meanwhile, intent yet shrinking, Ernest's mind sped along the new avenues of thought that were opening out before him.

"But what becomes of the dead?" he asked suddenly. "Where are they?"

The Lieutenant's voice was very low: "With God, I suppose. . . . But, look here! what about that

tooth of yours? Can't we find some handy surgery, and just pop in and get it dug out?"

"What! Before my dinner!" Ernest cried. "Why should I spoil my dinner? And anyway, I think I'd better wait till it starts aching again."

CHAPTER VII

“God, Who Is Our Home”

NOT VERY long after the morning of the Requiem, Lieutenant Turner was passed by his Medical Board as fit to return to the Front. Ernest saw little of him during his last days of leave; other and older friends and a devoted family had a prior claim, and the office boy had to stand aside. He did not resent it, recognizing that it was only just. But he could not help feeling gloomy and, as he expressed it, “out of it.” And when at length the Lieutenant had gone, a new sensation came to him, that of loneliness. Things, then, could never last, never go on as they were for long. Dimly, he apprehended the onward sweep of life, and kicked against it.

Still, he had escaped from the babel of voices. His interior life was much more tranquil. His tastes were different, and they were strong enough to hold him, so that he was no longer at the mercy

of every passing cry. Above all, he had learnt to find a refuge in the calm companionship of books. The Free Library supplied him with good ones. Soon he turned from fiction to books of travel, and even to biographies.

Then he began to buy books for himself—cheap editions, which he picked up on second-hand stalls. Whenever he read a book he specially liked, he would search about until he could procure a copy of his own. It was interesting to wander round the second-hand book-shops, fingering volumes, and dipping into them.

It was in this way that he came across St. Augustine. One Saturday evening, in a sixpenny box, he noticed a little brown volume, with the single word "Confessions" printed on the shabby cover. To Ernest, in his hunt after reality, this seemed to promise something true, something interesting, perhaps a spicy bit of biography. The shop was just closing, and there was no time for examination, so hurriedly he tendered sixpence and stuffed the book into his pocket.

He looked at it in bed that night, with a candle propped dangerously on a chair beside him, and

when he found that the author was a certain "Saint Augustine" he felt a momentary disappointment. "What a swizzle!" he murmured. It did not occur to him that a man with a reputation for sanctity could be *real* and interesting. However, he began to glance at the pages, and very soon he felt their fascination. I do not think that at this time Ernest would have waded through a complete translation of the immortal "Confessions," but this little volume was "edited," and being clearly printed and well set out, it succeeded in arresting his attention. With gathering interest he turned page after page. And he read:

"Highest, best, most mighty, most almighty; most merciful, most just; most far, and yet most near; fairest, yet strongest; fixed, yet incomprehensible; unchangeable, yet changing all things; never new, yet never old. . . ."

"In Thee is every moment of time, for the moments would have no path to fly by if Thou didst not contain them all. And since Thy years shall not fail, Thy years are one To-day. How many days of mine and of my fathers have passed through Thy To-day. . . . But Thou art the Same. The work of to-morrow and the days after,

the work of yesterday and the days before, Thou wilt do To-day, Thou hast done To-day."

"Love Him! Love Him! He made this world and He is not far off. He did not make it and leave it, but all is from Him and in Him. And where the sweetness of truth is, there is He. He dwells in the depth of the heart; but the heart has gone astray from Him."

"And I beheld with the mysterious vision of my soul the Light that never changes, above the eyes of my soul, above the powers of my mind. . . . Nor was it above my intelligence in the same way as oil is above water, or heaven above earth, but it was higher because it made me, and I was lower because made by it. He who knows the truth knows that Light, and he who knows that Light knows Eternity. Love knows that Light. O eternal Truth, and true Love, and loving Eternity, Thou art my God! Unto Thee do I sigh night and day. Directly I learnt of Thee, Thou didst draw me, making me understand that there was something to be seen, although I was not as yet fit to see it. And Thou didst beat back my weak sight, dazzling me with Thy splendor, and I thrilled with love and dread, and I perceived that I was far away from Thee in the land of unlikeness. . . . And I heard as the heart heareth, and there was left no room for doubt."

Ernest read too the account of the Saint's conversation with his mother concerning the Kingdom of Heaven; and although he could not follow its flight, something within him stirred feebly in response, helping him to believe, though not to understand, how indeed, after such an experience, "this world with all its pleasures seemed but a paltry thing."

There was, of course, a great deal in the book that Ernest could not grasp, yet, for all that—perhaps a little because of that—it appealed to him strongly; and again and again, in his round of working days, did he return to the small brown volume. Often he carried it in his pocket. From it he drew refreshment when his faculties, too jaded to pursue the fortunes of Quentin Durward, were yet capable of the upward leap of a few brief sentences. For there is no rest for the heart, even of a boy, except in Him for whom it was created.

It was a purely intellectual pleasure that Ernest drew from the pages of St. Augustine—the pleasure of looking up inquiringly at Something very high above him. He did not think of searching for himself, of trying to find out if God were there, still less of readjusting his life as a preliminary to the search.

And yet it was no insignificant service the little book had rendered him. Never again could religion be to him a mere jangle of the sects, nor, even in its crudest manifestations, a subject for ridicule. If true at all, it stretched above men's heads, vast as the starry heavens and as high. He did not formulate his ideas, but gradually, in the background of his mind, the thought took shape that God was Big—too Big to think about. Beautiful too. And Desirable!

About this time Ernest was finding his father very irritating. Mr. Grills had always been a man who liked to arrange everything in his own way with a view to his own personal convenience; this apart, he was not a bad father, and had tried to do his duty by his children, especially as regarded their material advancement. He knew the value of money—partly, perhaps, because he was conscious that he might have had a good deal more of it himself had he been a little less touchy and erratic, not quite so prone to throw jobs up. Middle life found him considerably more disposed to settle down, provided he could do so in a comfortable manner. He was a clever mechanic, and had always intended to teach Sidney his own trade; now, it occurred to him

that he might after all do worse than take in hand his rather refractory elder son, and train him to mend clocks and watches and brooches with a view to a small business of their own. For Mr. Grills was, as he put it, getting "fed up" with his employers, with the close back room and the never-ending work. He had the sense to realize, however, that he would be no better off for being his own master unless he could get hold of some one reliable, some one upon whose shoulders he could gradually lay the main burden of the work.

"We'll be our own masters," he said complacently, the first time he unfolded his plan to Ernest.

"But, father," objected the lad, "you said yourself when I went to Turners that I was fixed up for life."

"So you are—glued up for life, I should say. Do you want to be under the heels of a Boss till the time comes for you to turn up your toes?"

"The Boss has the worry and I draw the wages," said Ernest shrewdly. "Besides, he's a good Boss."

"Well, wouldn't I be a good Boss?"

"That's just it. I should only exchange one Boss for another."

"There's an unnatural way of putting it!" exclaimed the exasperated father.

But Ernest stuck to his point obstinately. He was at Turners; he was safely "fixed up for life"; and he was not going to jeopardize his future by giving in to this new scheme of his father's. Even had there been more stability about Mr. Grills, the plan did not appeal to Ernest. In spite of his early boyish fancy for "engineering," he had no real taste for mechanism; he did not care about close work. He got a certain very moderate amount of exercise and variety at Turners, and in any case he knew it would be no easy matter to work on terms of peace with his father.

"I know very well who's to thank that I've got such an ungrateful son," declared his parent. "It's that new friend of yours, that swanky Lieutenant. Think I don't see through it! Old Turner knows very well that the men is top dog now, not the masters, and so he just sets on that youngster of his to flatter up the greenest of his hands and keep them steady."

"Oh, chuck it!" cried Ernest. "You're talking idiotic." And he flung out of the house.

A letter from the Lieutenant was in his pocket.

He took it out now and read it as he went along, to soothe his ruffled temper:

"I was writing this letter to you" (it ran) "when a big enemy fighting-plane came over. We knew it was awfully near from the noise of its droning, yet we couldn't see it because of the dazzling moonlight. I shall never forget last night as long as I live—I have never seen such a white clear-cut earth, nor shadows of such an inky blackness. And there we sat in the guard-room waiting to be blown into bits! But we weren't. I'm sorry to say, though, that old Fritz managed to catch a little house in the next street. I've just been round to see it but it simply isn't there—at least there's only one scrap of wall left, the one where the crucifix hangs. That's there all right, and even the bit of blessed box they had tucked in behind it. You often see funny things like that out here. It can't always be chance.

"I want to tell you that the day before I came back I got myself made a Catholic. The priest talked about instruction, but of course there wasn't time. I really forced him to receive me—told him I had faith enough, and that I couldn't face it out here again unless he did as I asked—that it would be on his conscience if I fell and he'd refused me this. It wasn't that I was afraid of the guns, but when it came to the last, I was afraid of

missing my chance of doing what was true. We've only got one life to do it in, and sometimes that's so short. You'll understand.

"So long! Remember me to Miss Weekes.
How are her teeth? JACK."

CHAPTER VIII

“The Winds Come to Me from the Fields of Sleep.”

IT WAS spring. The disappointing chilliness, the damp, the mud, affected Ernest's spirits. He missed his friend; walks with Maud had become rarer and less interesting; his father nagged on ceaselessly about a man's being his own master, and Ernest opposed him with a cross and dogged obstinacy.

“I declare,” said Mr. Grills one Sunday, “that if you're such a noodle you can't see where your own interest lies, I'll get my firm to take on Algy and let me teach him. I s'pose he'll be my son-in-law some day if Emmy don't give him the shunt, and though his hands are as big as an elephant's puds, I reckon I'll be better off with a pud-handed son-in-law who knows where his bread's buttered, than with a dumb lunatic of a son.”

“All right,” answered Ernest sulkily. “You'd best take Algy in hand. He'll never get a home to-

gether grand enough for Emmy if he stays where he is."

"That's a way to talk about your sister!" interposed Mrs. Grills from the scullery. "Why shouldn't she have a nice home, same as you have a clean shirt every other day with your fidgety gentlemanly ways? Emmy's reasonable enough, and if she does stick out for an imitation marble mantel to set her vases out on, that's only right. Whether Algy has brains enough to see which is what in a clock, or fingers to lay hold of it when he does, is quite another thing."

"That don't matter," said Mr. Grills, knocking out his pipe. "I've plenty of brains for two. And, fact! I've always had to have the brains for all the family."

Ernest went out into the dreary streets. He decided to go to church. He was beginning to be interested in the "queer" religion which Lieutenant Turner (and also St. Augustine) had embraced, and he wanted to learn more about it. But he did not go to the small church where once he had taken Maud. He went to another and larger church a little further off.

This time he heard a sermon.

An old, old priest appeared in the pulpit, and preached from a text in the Psalms:

“I thought upon the days of old: and I had in my mind the eternal years.”

The voice was strong, the old face was curiously round and ruddy, like an apple. There was indeed something comical about it, and about the tufts of white hair sticking out from behind each ear. In his robust old age, his hearty jollity, the old monk would have made a capital Father Christmas. He spoke very simply, seriously yet without sadness, and in a way which all could understand, of the years that had rolled over the universe, of the years that had rolled over his own head and the heads of his hearers. He made them feel how, amid the rise and fall of races and of dynasties, amid all the pomp and poverty, the victories and plagues and slaughter, one fact stood out of such surpassing wonder, of such stupendous import, as to dwarf all else: that the Creator, the Eternal, Who made everything, holds everything in the hollow of His Hand, should have lived and worked and talked and slept and eaten on

this earth. There was no allusion to the War: somehow, Armageddon receded into the background, for no happening of Time could compare with this breathless marvel of Eternity. And so for a few minutes the war-weary, the anxious, the bereaved, viewed things in their true perspective, and were refreshed.

It was clear to Ernest that the old priest, who looked at once so jolly and so serious, possessed something that he himself did not. He felt that he should like to approach him, to speak to him, and by so doing he had a lurking hope that he might be drawing nearer to Mr. Jack. This contact with certainty and reality made him unaware that his own ideas about life and death were all in a fog—or, rather, that he had no settled ideas at all. He was living in chaos—an unbeliever, with no reasons for his unbelief. And so he knelt during the Benediction, trying to plan what he should say if he could summon up courage to go round to the sacristy after service—it needed some courage for a shy lad. He supposed that it was best to be truthful with priests, and certainly the old chap's small bright eyes looked capable of piercing a pretty thick crust of reticence.

At last a couple of sentences shaped themselves in his mind as fairly explanatory of the situation: "I don't know what to think about anything, and my friend's in danger at the Front." The idea of saying this out loud made him flush beforehand—he knew it would sound horribly stupid. Still, he really did feel that the moment had come to make an effort to inquire into things. He could not go on stumbling through life like this. And then, maybe, he dimly apprehended that in the ceaseless, swift, onward rush of existence, he had no chance of keeping any hold upon the friend he loved except through the Unchanging. But next moment, the organist was playing the people out, and a youth in front of Ernest rose and made his way to the sacristy—quite naturally and promptly, as if he had business on hand. Ernest watched him bend his knee at the top of the nave before turning to the right. The easy assurance of this son of the House seemed to leave no place for him. "They won't want to be bothered with me," he thought, and, half relieved, half disappointed, he decided to defer the interview until the following Sunday.

It happened that on Monday morning Ernest was a

little late at the office. He burst in, slightly out of breath from running, upon an unwonted hush. The cashier and Mr. Eylett were talking together, but they dropped their voices as he approached. The door of the Chief's room stood open. "Isn't he here yet?" Ernest asked. "He's not coming to-day," said Mr. Eylett, and the old cashier added: "He has had bad news—Mr. Jack's killed."

For a few instants the world stood still for Ernest. He never knew how he crossed the office to his desk, nor how it was he managed to pull out the right ledger. But his instinct of reserve came to his aid and helped him to force back the tell-tale tears. He discovered that the best way to maintain his self-control was to keep on doing things. So he worked hard that morning, conscious that the eyes of the others were upon him.

Presently, as he worked, a dumb anger took possession of him. He cared for so few people; why, then, was this one killed—this one, out of the many millions? It was all the senseless War! Surely, if there were any Power above, it could only be a stupid and malignant Power to let such things go on. And then, again, he felt resentful because he

himself was constituted as he was. He could not help himself, but certainly he would not have chosen to have a heart that felt so keenly and eyes that no exertion of his will would keep from getting moist. It was beastly hard on him, and quite undignified at the age of seventeen. Cyril, he knew, had no such difficulties to contend with. Decidedly, he was not one of the lucky ones.

After the first few days had passed, he grew to think less of himself and more of Jack; he was glad, when the news came through, that death had been instantaneous. He had even sympathy to spare for the Lieutenant's family. Yet always, in the background of his mind, he felt the pain of loss, with every now and then a sharper stab, as he realized momentarily the awful finality of the parting. For to him it seemed absolutely final. All his poor little unsubstantial fancies about the world beyond—fancies which had never amounted to hopes—vanished before the shock of the reality, before the blank silence, the grim unresponsiveness of this sudden disappearance. The loss meant so much more to him than the loss of Sidney had done. The

most vivid personality he knew had been swallowed up in the gulf, and the prospect of reunion did not so much as enter his head. All that sort of thing seemed to him like poetry and like music: some people went in for it, but it was not for him. He wanted *fact*. The idea of consulting the old priest simply faded from his mind. He thought no more about it. He had indeed lost interest in a Power that dealt or could permit such blows. Doubtless, things were just blind chance. All the same, he cherished a sore and angry sense of injury.

Meanwhile, life stretched before him, a dreary, unending, headachy expanse. He got, as he said, "sick of things," as only very young people can. He grew careless from lack of interest, and when the cashier reprimanded him, he answered insolently. That gentleman complained to Mr. Turner. All the men had been kind to Ernest, knowing of his friendship with the Lieutenant—even those who had been jealous and had called it ridiculous, had been kind. But now a month had passed, and they thought he ought to have got over it. A month! Yet really it spoke well for all of them (in particular, for the

cashier, who suffered from the gout) that they had been lenient with a slack and touchy youth for a whole month.

Mr. Turner delivered the necessary reprimand, but he too, for his son's sake, felt disposed to be lenient with Ernest, and even for longer than a month. He talked to him seriously, inquired into the hours he kept, suggested that he needed glasses, and finally directed him to see his doctor. When the doctor reported him "run down" (convenient and non-committal term!), he very readily granted him a holiday.

At first Ernest felt more bored still, at the thought of a holiday. The climax came when Mr. Turner spoke of getting him a ticket for a Seaside Home. "Oh, no! Sir," cried Ernest in alarm. "It isn't necessary, indeed, Sir!—I can go to friends."

"Where?" demanded Mr. Turner, fixing him with his single eyeglass.

"In Cornwall," murmured Ernest. This seemed to satisfy "the Boss."

He had drifted into it on the spur of the moment, but after all, it was true. He *could* go to Cornwall. Had not Mrs. Tredinnick told him: "If you ever

want a holiday, you're more than welcome." And she had kissed him.

Yes, he would go. But he felt very lethargic about it. It was characteristic of his state of inertia that he did not trouble to write. He just put some things into a bag and started off next morning.

It was late spring—a little early in this climate for a holiday, perhaps, but one cannot always choose.

The clerk, Ernest, went to Paddington at approximately the same time that the schoolboy had done years ago, and he found the same train waiting to start. He got into it. How easy it all was! But this time there was no Cyril, and no officer's lady; only a very tall New Zealand private, and a red-cheeked gentleman in a suit of indigo blue. And again the brilliant patches of color on Sutton's Seed Testing Ground caught his eye—different colors this time, because it was earlier in the year. And again there were the interminable fields and sky. Presently, the sun shone out quite hotly. Yes, it was all the same, only it was not the same boy—not the same free, gay heart.

He gazed languidly out of the window. After

all, the air and the sunshine and the green fields were very pleasant. The New Zealander drew out a big pipe and lit up, so Ernest too pulled out a cigarette. This time he did not feel sick. And once he had looked at the face opposite him, he could not help looking again. It was a remarkable face—very attractive in its strength and sadness. The high bronzed cheek-bones, the intelligent brow, the steady hazel eyes, the resolute melancholy mouth, were all stamped with the impress of an unusual personality. When the soldier stood up to lift his haversack from the rack, his splendid physique became still more apparent.

And the gentleman in indigo was not much below him in height. He had dark straight hair, a bright complexion, and very big, restless, merry black eyes. His whole bearing indicated a bold self-confidence. Both men looked about thirty-five years of age. They soon made friends and began to chat.

Ernest, leaning back, his eyes half closed, listened at first drowsily, and then with interest. They talked with the freemasonry of comrades, for both had been at the Front, although he of the indigo suit was now discharged and on his way back to Canada. They

spoke, to begin with, of "tight places"—out there; but very soon they turned to things which evidently seemed to them of more abiding import, and presently the London lad had learnt their history in rough outline. The New Zealander's father, a country clergyman, had apprenticed him to a gentleman farmer in Yorkshire, who had taught him nothing. By-and-by the uselessness of the life had dawned upon him, and this, joined to a longing for adventure, had driven him out to Australia. Within fourteen days of landing he was working on a farm for thirteen shillings a week and his food. "I got a job killing rabbits," he said. "Hard, at times, but I used to say to myself that there were plenty of chaps in the old country who would be only too glad to pay through their noses to do what I was doing, and would look upon it as a picnic. Later, I went to New Zealand, and now I've got a small place of my own there. To my mind, it's the finest climate in the world."

The other nodded: "Canada for me," he said. "I slipped across as a stowaway from a Liverpool slum when I was twelve. I'd no work and I was as poor as a rat and nobody wanted me. So I stowed

myself away on a ship and got out to Montreal. And when I landed I hid on a train going West. Got off at some little town whose name I've forgotten, and stood around looking lost. At last an old farmer came up to me. 'Where do you come from,' says he, 'Montreal?' 'Oh, further than that,' says I. 'Where are you going then?' 'I'm sure I don't know,' says I, 'I'm lost.' Then and there he offered me work, and I climbed up into his cart and he drove me off."

"It's a grand life," remarked the New Zealander.

"You're right. Like to see my little show?"

Eagerly, he opened his suitcase, and very soon the seat was covered with small photographs. He arranged them with naïve pride in two orderly rows. They represented the wide prairie, a low wooden house, horses, cattle, agricultural implements. The man in khaki looked, commented, and admired.

But the Canadian, turning, caught sight of the pale, slightly built youth, with an expression half interested, half scornful, in his light gray eyes.

"Like to see?" he asked, good-naturedly.

So Ernest looked too.

The New Zealander examined him keenly. Then

he leant forward and said in a tone of persuasive kindness: "Why don't you cross?"

"Why should I?" retorted Ernest. "England's the best country in the world. And London's the finest city in the world."

Far from contented with life as he was at that moment, he would never have dreamed of crossing the water. He was a thorough Londoner, and had no mind to rough it in the Colonies.

"Why don't you cross?" persisted the New Zealander quietly, in his refined yet virile voice. "I reckon any man with any health and sense can soon get on and make his way over yonder. You've no chance here of being your own master within a reasonable number of years. And you'd see life. London isn't life. Theaters and Pictures—that's not a man's life, it's all a rotten pretense. And don't you have to pay for your pleasure! Open air and the bush or the prairie, and sixpence between you and starvation—that's life!"

"London, indeed!" cried the merry-eyed Canadian. "I've just been down to see my sister, Barking way. And I said to her: 'How can you bear to live in this hat-box of a house, with nothing all round you

but cats and kids?" Good Lord! I'd never seen so many cats and kids in my life. 'I don't notice it,' says she. 'Oh, don't you!' says I. 'Well, I do, and I'm sorry, but I can't stand it, and so I'm off.' "

Ernest looked from one to the other. Somehow, these big strong men made him feel very small and helpless and absurd. He was conscious of being at a disadvantage. His sensitive mouth twitched a little as he gave a quick nervous laugh, but he set it obstinately. He was not going to give in:

"Talk as you like, you won't persuade me. I wouldn't cross the sea whatever you paid me. Why should I go? There's plenty of work in England. I dare say there's good chances over there for a chap that likes that sort of thing. But if he doesn't, what's the good of going? I like civilized life, and there's no place like London."

"London civilized! The biggest sink of iniquity in the whole world!" The New Zealander looked half quizzingly, half pityingly at the raw lad. But he did not urge him further. He was far too much of a gentleman to point out to him that their respective physique proved all too clearly which was the more desirable life.

"You shouldn't run down England," said Ernest. "You belonged to England once. You're British now—and I'm British. And the British are the finest race in the world. Don't we have to be everywhere—in France, Belgium, Italy, Russia, Africa—everywhere on all the Fronts, settling things? They couldn't get on without us. And I shall go soon . . ."

He broke off. He was thinking of Mr. Jack—a Londoner. He was thinking of his country. It was true he did not often think of her, but he was not going to have her run down.

The New Zealander glanced at him with quick sympathy. Hadn't he seen them, these men from the great city, on more than one Front—"settling things," as Ernest said!

But the train was slackening as it approached Exeter.

"Talk of London!" said the Colonial soldier. "Here's another awful hole, though in quite a different sort of way. And I'm going to stop in it to see my uncle. A fine old place, of course, but wouldn't it stifle one to live in a city!—no air, moral or physical. Durham, again!—there's another place for you! I was held up there once in the middle

of the night. Just a village on a hill, with nothing to eat."

The two men got out. "Good-by," they called, "Good-by!"

Presently the train was steaming forward again, through wooded meadow-land, to Dawlish and Teignmouth. But the compartment was not as it had been. Into the stuffy atmosphere of the little island train swept a breath of the wild breezes of the prairie. Beyond the blue waves of the Channel rolled the billows of the Atlantic, and beyond these again, wrapped in mystery, lay the plains and mountains of the New World—immense, unknown. Almost, the echoes from those heights reached Ernest; almost, the winds from those unending fields stirred his hair. This had the two Colonials done for him.

Yet the small stubborn Englishman was unconvinced.

CHAPTER IX

“No More Shall Grief of Mine the Seasons Wrong.”

ERNEST was conservative by nature. When he reached Plymouth, he made his way straight to the refreshment room and secured a pot of tea and Cornish pasties. They were just as tasty as in the past, just as hot and peppery. He was very hungry, for he had omitted to provide himself with any lunch, so he ate four. Thus fortified, he inquired when there would be a train for Saltash.

And again the local train steamed leisurely past rows of houses, through Devonport and other smaller stations. Soon Ernest recognized the suspension bridge, and the river with its big gray ships.

Quickly, he found his way out of the little country station. This time there was no trap to meet him, and though a motor omnibus would have taken him part of the way, he preferred to walk. So he shouldered his light bag, and went at a swinging pace

up the long quaint Fore Street, merging in the high road that led to the open country. All around him was the soft, fresh promise of spring; and with every breath he drew, he inhaled the delightful grassy, woody odor of the country, so noticeable at first to a townsman.

At last he came to the lane between high banks, and so to the sharp curve at the top of the steep hill. Then, suddenly, he halted and caught his breath. For below him stretched the valley full of trees, and this time it was a mass of white blossom, for the cherry orchards were in flower. From behind the snowy splendor of the orchards rose the gray tower of the church; to the right were the chimneys of Marraton; and, further still, the gleaming belt of water lay at the foot of the smoky-blue wall of the moors.

Ernest looked for a long time before he could bring himself to move. His memory had not prepared him for anything so beautiful. But indeed he saw it all now for the first time, for since he was last here, his eyes had been opened.

Presently he walked on, more slowly, but with rising spirits. The air, the exercise, the glory of

the spring evening, had driven forth the demon of depression and irritability. He felt quite young again, like a boy—as he was. The routine of daily work, the crowded streets, the voice of his father expounding the Grills theory of life, seemed to lie a very long way off; and instead, was the sense of distance, the illusion of freedom. Beyond the far sweep of the horizon lay mile upon mile of sparsely populated country, dotted with villages whose very names Ernest did not know—might never know. He could walk and walk, if he willed, through this unknown country and under this boundless sky. He might halt where he would and make a fresh life for himself—a life utterly different from that planned for him by his father, or from that which awaited the fortunate and trustworthy employee of Mr. John Turner. Anything was possible in this vast world.

For the moment, however, not the unknown but the familiar beckoned him. Another bend in the road, a strip of level lane with the chimneys of Marraton peeping through the trees on his right, one more descent, shorter and less steep, and then came the glint of water and Bunny's House.

It was quite chilly by the time he came to the long

low building standing a little back from the creek, with a clump of trees behind it. He stood there quietly for a few minutes, strangely glad to see it again, puzzled by this new emotion, this love for a place, for a house. And he was ashamed too, and suddenly a little anxious. He had been accustomed to think of the Tredinnicks as always here. But suppose they were not here. Suppose an evil Fate had been busy here too! Stealthily he approached, and looked through the unscreened window.

The flames from the wood fire were leaping up, and he caught sight of Mrs. Tredinnick laying the cloth for supper.

He turned to the door, and knocked loudly.

For a second or two, when the old woman opened it, she hesitated; then, when the firelight fell upon the fair boyish face, a little nervous and deprecating, she stretched out both her hands:

"Ernie!" she cried. "Why ever didn't you write, so that Father could meet you with the trap? But come in—you're more than welcome."

"Oh! Mrs. Tredinnick, I'm awfully sorry," stammered Ernest, filled with contrition for his past neglect, and happiness that she was just as he re-

membered her—the same smooth brown hair, the same arched eyebrows and curved lips that gave her the “curvy” look. He had always felt that he had seen her before, now he remembered where—she was exactly like a picture of Polichinello in a prize-book he had won as a child.

But the brown eyes were looking at him very kindly, and she cut short his attempt at an apology by giving him a resounding smack of a kiss.

“You know I’m pleased to see you,” she said, “and the supper’s almost ready. But you must wash your hands first.”

So Ernest came home.

Later, when they had all gone up to bed and the farmhouse was silent, he knelt as once before upon the window-seat. Under the clump of fir-trees it was very dark, but the stars maneuvered gloriously overhead. The stillness that hid within it such multitudinous sounds did not appall him now. On the crest of just such a low hill as that yonder, he pictured the Lieutenant sleeping. Viewed thus, death did not seem unkind. The tranquil, starlit earth was reassuring. Not altogether sadly, but with a touch of pride, he thought of the broken friendship.

Of the future and of what it held, he did not think at all. Yielding to the soothing influence of the present hour, he climbed into the bed and fell asleep, singularly content.

Farmer Tredinnick had been scarcely less pleased than his wife at Ernest's reappearance. The years were beginning to tell upon him, and rheumatism, that curse of the countryside, had already got a grip of his strong hard hands. He missed his son Tom, who was still in France. "They might have left him to me," he said to Ernest. "But never mind!—talking won't bring him back any sooner. And we're most in the same box—there's no one young left to do anything now. I'm sure they're always threatening to take the Squire's Harry. That reminds me—you'd best go up to Marraton first thing in the morning and report yourself. You'll find the old gentleman sadly altered—goes out in a wheeled-chair now."

So next day, after he had waited on Mrs. Tredinnick while she made "me butter," Ernest took the path through the hilly orchard which led past the cherry and the apple trees into the avenue of beeches. There, he walked more slowly, his feet crunching into the soft carpet formed by last year's beech-mast. It

was sunny, and the light in the avenue was not as yet subdued by the thick canopy of green through which it would have to pass later in the season. Thus he had an uninterrupted view of the grassy field on the other side of the marsh, which rose abruptly to a point where it was crowned by the gray stone buildings of a farm. Ernest loitered along, looking now upwards to the high roof of branches, and now sideways between the mossy trunks. Then, he stood still. For there at his feet, propped against the roots of one of the largest of the trees, was the little grotto which he and Cyril had built years ago. A few of the lighter stones had been misplaced, part of the roof of twigs had gone, but in the main, the construction still held good. Half amused, half wistful, he remained gazing down at this link with his boyhood—this child's fancy which, in its sheltered nook, had weathered through so many winter storms. To be sure, it was solidly built.

He raised his head, and saw a tall woman coming towards him along the straight narrow path. She had no hat, and the rays of sunshine played upon her glossy, wavy black hair. It was parted in the middle, and fastened loosely in a simple knot, framing a

vivid, highly-colored face, with a nose that turned up slightly, lips a trifle thick, and wide-open, frank, flashing dark eyes. She wore a blue serge coat and skirt, and a thin blouse of lighter blue open at the throat. Her height, her easy bearing, her finely developed figure, made her an imposing and arresting apparition. Ernest drew aside to let her pass.

She gave the stranger lad a swift glance as she came up to him. "Good morning," she said, for it was not the custom at Marraton to pass any one without a greeting. "Are you looking at the grotto?"

"I built it," he said quickly. And his hand went up to his cap.

"You?"

"Oh! years ago—when I was a boy."

"I see," she nodded, and a very merry expression danced in her big dark eyes. "Then you are one of those London boys that Mrs. Tredinnick has talked to me about. Are you staying at Bunny's House?"

"Yes, I came last night."

"How glad Mrs. Tredinnick will be! There's such lots to do just now and so few people to help, and the dear old farmer's getting so rheumatic."

"I'm afraid I don't know much about things," said Ernest, "but of course I mean to try and do all I can." This resolution, although instantaneous, was sincere.

"You'll be a great help, I'm sure. You must be handy to have built such a grotto. Do you know, I'm awfully fond of it. I never pass along here without stopping to look at it."

"Really!"

"Yes, really. And I'm sure St. James is pleased."

Ernest looked puzzled.

"St. James of Compostella—you built it for him, didn't you?"

"I don't know anything at all about him," confessed Ernest, flushing.

"No more did I, till Mr. Warfelton told me," she acknowledged promptly. "He's so clever, he knows everything. And he explained to me that we English used to build shrines once to St. James—those of us who couldn't go on a pilgrimage to Spain—and that little grottoes like yours are a relic of that custom."

"I didn't know," said Ernest. "I just built one because the children in our street always built one. And we used to sit by it and call out: 'A penny for the Grotto!' How could we know why?"

"How, indeed! I'm sure St. James understood that."

Ernest gave her one of his rapid, nervous glances. But she was not laughing at him. On the contrary, she looked at him very kindly, protectingly almost, as she had a right to do since she was nearly twice his age.

"Good-by for the present," she said. "But you haven't told me your name."

"Ernest Grills," he answered, lifting his cap once more.

"And I am Mrs. Parracomb," she informed him, with the graciousness of the grand lady desirous of putting the nice, shy boy at his ease. "I live at Maraton now and help Miss Warfelton. Well, good-by, Mr. Grills—we shall be meeting again."

The "Mr. Grills" was very gratifying to Ernest. Hardly anybody called him that. He felt exceedingly pleased with himself as he passed through the wicket gate into the garden, and walked up to the pillared porch.

Mr. Warfelton was seated in his armchair at the big writing-table in the library. He had just finished a cursory perusal of the *Western Morning News*, and

was about to settle down to his correspondence, when Ernest was ushered in.

"'Pon my soul!" he ejaculated, "if it isn't one of the Bunnies come back! Well, my lad, which is it, Cyril or Ernie? And by Jove! whichever it is, you've grown."

"It's Ernie, Sir," said the youth.

"To be sure! How stupid I am! I remember you perfectly. Ah! my boy, you'll notice a great difference in me since you were last here."

"I don't see any difference," said Ernest. Nor did he.

"Maybe not. The top story's all right, praise God! It's the pegs that have given out. Actually have to be wheeled about my own garden! And to think that my dear father, when he was ninety-two, gave the yard-boy a good thrashing! Well, well! We're not all granted the same graces, though I suppose, taking one thing with another, the share-out's pretty equal. Eh, Ernie? And where do you hail from? And what have you been doing all this time?"

"I'm still living in London, Sir, and I'm clerk now to some corn merchants."

"Couldn't stand London myself—not for a day—but I suppose there are seven or eight million people not of my opinion. However! Well, so we folk down here do the work and grow the corn, and it's your business to lay your fingers on it and tot up the profits in the ledgers, eh?"

"I don't think it's quite like that," said Ernest quickly, ruffling up under criticism as he had done the previous day in the train.

"Don't mind me," said the old gentleman. "Good boy! Good boy! Have a glass of cider? Here, Ceta," as his niece entered, "now I come to think of it, I didn't have my third cup of tea this morning, and it's a very thirsty day."

"Oh, Uncle!" expostulated Miss Warfelton, as she shook hands with Ernest. "It's only ten o'clock." But all the same she took the hint and went smilingly to draw a jug of cider.

Mr. Warfelton poured out a full glass for Ernest and about a quarter of a glass for himself, to keep the lad in countenance.

"Now, Ernie," he said, raising his glass, "Ernie—what's your name?"

"Grills," said the boy.

"Right! Your very good health, then, Mr. Grills, and I hope you're making a long stay."

"I suppose it will be a fortnight, Sir," said Ernest.

"A fortnight! Why, you won't have time to eat and drink enough to pay your return railway fare. And how are you going to amuse yourself?"

"I'm going to help Mr. Tredinnick," replied Ernest stoutly, mindful of his resolution a few minutes back in the avenue. "At least, I'm going to try."

The decision in his tone made the Squire consider him more attentively. "You're a rattling good fellow, Mr. Ernest Grills," he said, his eyes twinkling as they rested on the weedy, narrow-chested youth, with the pale face and slightly crooked mouth, "a rattling good fellow! Come and see me again to-morrow—come about five, and I shall be out in the garden. And if there's anything an old man can offer you beyond a glass of the finest cider in the county, perhaps you'll let me know."

Ernest glanced from the kindly, wrinkled old face to the book-lined walls, and took courage.

"Please, Sir," he said, "if you don't mind, I should so much like to borrow a book."

"To be sure, it might come in handy *if* ever you

stop working for half-an-hour," said Mr. Warfelton slyly. "Choose for yourself."

Ernest turned his back on the windows hung with skins for curtains, and began studying the long rows of books on the opposite side of the room. There were a great many books, and very beautiful ones, bound as he had never seen books bound before. A complete set of Dickens's novels in morocco caught his eye. He opened the glass door of the bookcase and took out *Barnaby Rudge* which he had not yet read, fingering it admiringly. Then he put it back; it looked too grand, and it smelt too nice.

"Well, can't you make up your mind?" asked the Squire.

"They're too fine for me," murmured Ernest. "I'm afraid."

Sisceta Warfelton came forward. "Oh, no," she said reassuringly. "I'm sure you will take care. Besides, if you're afraid, I can put a cover on for you."

And, without waiting for a reply, she opened the door of the cupboard that formed the base of the bookcase, and took out a piece of brown paper and a big pair of scissors. Swiftly and neatly the book

was covered, and the ends of brown paper tucked in and secured with a dab of "Stickphast." "There now," she said, "you won't be worried."

Sisceta was always doing things for people—not big or showy things, but little things perfectly. She made so few demands on life for herself that others did not mind coming to her for all sorts of small offices. They had no need to feel that they were taking up valuable time, or interfering with any personal plans. It was her life—just to be there, to be always ready. Only her uncle and those who were brought into close contact with her, understood how important was the rôle she played in the household. She herself did not realize it, and at times had a flash of astonishment when the high opinion which her uncle had of her was revealed by some chance word or event. She was quite aware that she was not what people called "clever," nor was she interesting and good-looking like Mrs. Parracomb; neither was she ugly—she was merely ordinary. She did not know that in her humble and retired existence she filled a niche that no one else could have filled, and certainly she would have been exceedingly surprised had any one pointed out to her the attractiveness of

her gentle, unassuming face. She was loved by others, but she did not influence them, and perhaps it was the knowledge that she lacked the gift (often a dangerous one) of dominating and influencing her fellows, that had forced upon her the conclusion that she was a person of no account. She did not mind; she did not think about herself enough to mind. But, as with quiet self-effacement, pleasant and gentle, she went about the familiar duties of the house, this latent conviction ended by making her, as the years went on, ever a little more subdued, a little more colorless. It even found increasing expression in her outward appearance. The dull brown hair, curled, and carefully arranged in a fringe kept tidy by a net; the small shapely head that drooped a trifle forward; the pale thin lips set in a melancholy yet a kindly line; the light brown eyes that smiled so naturally at the little childish jokes and happenings of daily life; the scrupulously neat dress, high at the throat—all were significant of the retiring spirit within. There could not have been a greater contrast than that between her and Mrs. Parracomb, yet the two women were firm friends.

When the partial disablement of the Squire and

the increasing difficulty of obtaining efficient domestic service had rendered more help necessary, Miss Warfelton had engaged Mary Parracomb as assistant housekeeper. For both it proved a great boon. Mary found herself left at three-and-thirty without a penny in the world, and with a delicate little girl of six to support; she had been brought up luxuriously, and there was no special work for which she was trained. Even in domestic matters she was not always effective. But this did not trouble Miss Warfelton, herself a perfect housewife: a capable, domineering housekeeper would have made her miserable. Mrs. Parracomb was willing and good-natured, eager to learn, and ready to acknowledge that she did not know. Her handsome presence and engaging frankness won the old Squire's heart. The world had not used her well before she came to Mar-raton—but here, with these simple upright people of her own class, who treated her as one of themselves, and never thought of getting all the work they could out of her, she found a home. In her, too, behind the assured manners of society and the well-cut clothes, was something very simple, childlike and affectionate, coupled with a certain other-worldly wis-

dom and a strange insight into character. She came to love Sisceta Warfelton, seeing in her all those sterling unobtrusive virtues which others were wont to profit by without recognizing; and if anything could have raised the older woman in her own esteem it would have been the undisguised admiration of her new friend. "But it's only Mary," thought Sisceta, and turned to planning how to make another frock for little Clare Parracomb in her convent school.

The following day, Ernest went up to Marraton about five o'clock, as he had been told to do. He found the Squire in the garden in his wheeled-chair. Mrs. Parracomb had wheeled him out, and he was inspecting the great field lately planted with potatoes, that swelled from the marsh almost up to the front door. Before the War, this had been sloping pasture-land, but, in deference to the directions of the Local Authorities, it had now been plowed up and planted. "Though who is to dig up all those potatoes and who is to eat them, goodness only knows!" remarked Mr. Warfelton. "There were a lot wasted last year, but that didn't bother me. It seemed to be nobody's fault, and then I looked upon them as the price of Harry. You see, they told me I might keep

my man Harry if I'd only plow up some more land."

The Squire gazed with pride at his giant potato field, and then away to the left between the gap formed by the plane tree and the mulberry tree, to where the waters of the creek lay like a tranquil tarn at the foot of the steep wooded hill. Behind him was the green-shuttered and granite mansion that had been the home of his race for generations. It had been built at the Restoration after the model of a French *château*; but long before that, back in the fifteenth century, there had been a house at Marraton, and it had sheltered de Valletorts, Talbots, Daunays, Courtenays and Waddons, before it had passed into the family of the Warfeltons. Some of the walls and doorways of the older house were retained when it was rebuilt in 1660; a part still lay in ruins behind the inner courtyard, overgrown with nettles and brambles. And the big gardens had fallen into semi-disorder, for Harry could not pretend to cope with the luxuriant growth of weed and shrub and tree—all he could do was to keep the gardens fairly straight, and provide the vegetables necessary for the household.

This evening Ernest helped Mrs. Parracomb to wheel the Squire round his gardens. First, they went down a narrow steep little path into a broader and a winding one bordered by shrubs, which was known at Marraton as "the Serpentine." They paused for a few minutes at the tiny pond fed by a pipe direct from the well, a pond where goldfish dived and played the summer through, under the spreading leaves of water-lilies. "Yellow centers to the flowers when they come out," said the old gentleman, "to match the fish." Mrs. Parracomb sat on the garden seat, and Ernest stood beside the chair, feeling curiously at home in this intimate and simple life, and almost as though he had never known any other. Presently, they went on to the rose garden, and then they wheeled abruptly to the left, and with patient ingenuity maneuvered the chair through a door in the red brick wall into the walled garden. There was a great deal to inspect here, and Mrs. Parracomb and Ernest found it as much as they could do to get the chair along the narrow weed-grown paths without unduly damaging the borders of box. Again they rested—this time on a little broken-down seat by the cucumber frame, overgrown with mint;

and when Ernest went to bed that night his clothes still retained an aromatic fragrance somewhat prosaically reminiscent of lamb and new potatoes. Finally, they returned to the house by another way, passing through a second door into yet another walled garden, and then out again into a veritable miniature wood, so that they had to lift the chair over the projecting tree-roots before they could regain the drive.

"Thank you both," said the Squire, when they reached the pillared porch. "And now, Master Grills, I think my good stick and your stout arm will finish the job. Good boy! Come again to-morrow."

And so every evening after tea Ernest went to Marraton. In the mornings he helped Mr. Tredinnick with the work of the little fruit farm, learning incidentally many things, and putting his hand to any task that presented itself. After the midday dinner, he would wash up for Mrs. Tredinnick, and then he would sit at the open window in the black-timbered parlor, turning the pages of *Barnaby Rudge*, and conscientiously looking up in a dictionary borrowed from Marraton any words he did not fully understand. Thus the full and happy days went by, and although Ernest did not forget his dead friend, as-

surely he had not time to think of him so often. The new duties claimed such close attention, the new environment cast so potent a spell. Let it not be regretted, still less blamed. I am sure that the dead do not blame. They, at least, thank God for the healing remedies of Time and Change which make life possible for those whom they have left behind them sorrowing.

CHAPTER X

“Years That Bring the Philosophic Mind.”

MARRATON is a mile from the village, and now that he could no longer walk, Mr. Warfelton used to drive with his niece to church on Sunday in the low pony carriage, putting up at the Rectory. The church is a very old one. Its registers date from 1550, but it is said to have been built by a Crusader of Flemish extraction in the thirteenth century. The figure of a knight carved in stone lies under a low arch in the north wall, and the ringed coat of mail and long shield certainly point to great antiquity. There seems little reason to doubt that this figure represents the “gentleman” who, as an old Parochial History of Cornwall says, “founded this church in order for the commutation of sins committed, and to pray for the founder’s soul, his ancestors, and relatives; by which expedients most religious houses and churches heretofore were built.”

The six bells cast in the early eighteenth century

were pealing, when Mr. Warfelton entered the church, leaning on his niece's arm. He threw an affectionate glance upward at the quaint sundial (also eighteenth century) over the porch, with its legend: "Time's on the wing, death's approaching, the hour's uncertain." The warning did not make him at all uncomfortable. It was part of the natural order of things, of the rise and fall of seasons and of the ingathering of crops with which his life was occupied. And then for him death was merely the door through which he would pass into closer proximity to his God and to his wife. To-day he went slowly to his seat, with a complacent look at the stained glass window in the north aisle in commemoration of an old friend who had fallen in the Boer War. It was too far off for Mr. Warfelton to read the inscription on the brass tablet below, but he knew that it was one which afforded him keen satisfaction, beginning as it did with the words, "To the Glory of God," and ending with the dead General's favorite motto: "Good luck have thou with thine honor, ride on!" This motto appealed to the Squire too, for he had ever been one to "ride on," though not indeed to war, so long as he could throw leg over horse; and besides, its soldierly quality linked up in

his mind the Crusader of old with the Armageddon of to-day. For the Squire was not of those who thought that wars would ever cease, since his knowledge of human nature had taught him how enduring and recrudescient is injustice. And if there must be wars, the thing was to fight well and honorably. Some of his race had been soldiers. Others had been builders, and had crossed India leaving bridges and railway lines in their track.

Ernest was not at church—he was helping Farmer Tredinnick with the animals. Very few men came to church on Sunday morning, not very many in the evening. This was a source of grief to the old Squire. “Degenerate days,” he murmured, shaking his head. Still, he recognized that some went to chapel, and that in general the countryman has a busy life, for twice a day there are the animals to be attended to, and then again, Sunday is his only opportunity for lounging over meals. At all events, he put no pressure on any one, not even on his man Harry, who spent a good part of Sunday in keeping down the rats that swarmed on his parents’ little farm.

And so, although Ernest had not been to church,

the pleasant and human old gentleman took no umbrage, but invited him to tea when he came upon him loitering under the noble Spanish chestnuts in the lane behind Marraton.

"Do Great Grandfather credit, don't they?" he cried, waving his whip towards the giant trunks with their shapely boughs, soon to be covered with magnificent spiked leaves.

"I believe you're quite fond of that boy, Uncle," said Sisceta, as they drove on after the momentary halt.

"Well, he's not a bad boy, my dear, if my judgment's not at fault. Besides, I've an idea."

"What now?"

"Never you mind," replied her uncle. "I'm just going to throw out a suggestion—oh! a very discreet and slight suggestion. If it bears fruit, good. If not, there'll be no harm done."

"Really, Uncle, you're a very clever old man," said Miss Warfelton.

And he was.

When Ernest appeared punctually at half-past-four, tea was already set on the big round table in the center of the library. There were large cups for

the Squire and Ernest, and small ones for Miss Warfelton and Mrs. Parracomb. Hardly had tea begun, when there was a scrunch on the gravel outside, and a tall gentleman with a square face and a bald head walked unceremoniously into the room, without the formality of a preliminary ring at the front door. He was a scientist of considerable reputation who sometimes came over from Plymouth for the pleasure of a chat with Mr. Warfelton. Ernest was annoyed that he had come, for it rather spoilt the tea-party for him. He did not know, of course, that he was in the presence of a celebrity, but he did feel a little awed, so far as a Cockney is capable of being awed—or perhaps the word “vexed” better describes his feeling. Mr. Warfelton too was not altogether pleased that the Professor had selected Sunday for his visit. He thought it rather stupid of him.

“Shall you want the pony-carriage at six?” asked Sisceta in a low voice.

“To be sure,” said the Squire, with an innocent look of surprise. “Why not?” He allowed nothing except illness to interfere with his attendance at Evensong.

The big clock in the hall struck five, and Miss Warfelton rose. Ernest was glad; he felt out of touch with the square-faced man whose eyes rested upon him with such calm attention whenever he ventured a remark.

"Come and see our drawing-room," said Sisceta, who knew that her uncle would want to chat undisturbed with the Professor. "You come too, Mary."

Ernest followed them across the hall into a very long and spacious room. He had never seen so fine a one. Everywhere there were skins, and he nearly stumbled over a big tiger's head staring up at him with fierce glass eyes. There were five windows, and the one at the far end looked out over the gleaming creek. It was the same view that Mr. Warfelton had been admiring from his chair outside the porch the evening before. Ernest praised it now; words came more easily in the absence of the man with the square face and penetrating eyes.

"Yes, it's beautiful," said Mary Parracomb. "But now look at the ceiling, Mr. Grills. Would you have expected to find such a ceiling in the depths of the country? Pure Italian."

No; Ernest would not have expected to find it, but

neither had he expected to find Mrs. Parracomb. Nor would he have known that it was Italian had he not been told. However, he managed to ask fairly sensibly who painted it.

"Some Italian artist," said Miss Warfelton, as Ernest continued gazing up at the delicately modelled Graces curvetting around amid festoons of faintly tinted flowers. "Do you see those empty squares in the center? The tale runs that the artist died before he could complete his design. He was lying on his back on the scaffolding, eating cherries while he painted and he swallowed a stone and was choked. Poor fellow!"

"I don't think he's much to be pitied," said the boy. "People can't live forever. And he died in this lovely house, eating the Marraton cherries . . ."

He pulled himself up because Mrs. Parracomb was laughing. "Oh, don't be cross with me!" she exclaimed. "I can't help it. You did say it so nicely, and of course the Marraton cherries are very excellent."

Ernest smiled, but he was silent, wondering if he had said anything foolish. Then, to put him at his ease again, she suggested:

"Ceta, I think Mr. Grills would like to see the skin-room. May I take him up?"

"Of course you may. The keys are in the bag on my writing-table. And take the tin of insect-killer with you—I never unlock the door without scattering some about."

They mounted the broad staircase, and Ernest inspected the horns and antlers that looked down upon him from the walls, while Mrs. Parracomb went to fetch the bunch of keys from Miss Warfelton's room. He had quite forgiven her for laughing at him.

"Now, come!" she said. The staircase, which half way up divided into two flights, led to a long corridor running the whole length of the house. Doors opened on to it—a great many doors. And if the carpets were worn; if, like the gardens, the whole house was not kept up to the standard of order which would have appealed to a wealthy *parvenu*, that did but enhance the impression of age, of the passage of bygone generations who had left something of themselves behind them in the mellowed paint and faded hangings. No carpenter had as yet replaced the baluster damaged by a kick from Grandfather Warfelton's heavy nailed boot when, as a boy, he had

fought with an offending cousin at the top of the stairs. And though all was fresh and clean, it was not, as the Squire used to say, with a "destructive type of cleanliness."

Mrs. Parracomb took Ernest up a second staircase, uncarpeted this time, which led to a corridor exactly similar to the one beneath it. The rooms here were unused, except for lumber; for when an old gentleman and his niece live together in a house of thirty rooms, it is not necessary that they or their modest staff should mount to the top story. After some fumbling, Mary succeeded in finding the right key, and preceded Ernest into a big bare room full of skins. Some were hanging on the walls, protected by sheets, and others were rolled in bundles on the floor. His guide drew aside the coverings and named the skins, scattering, as she did so, some of the insect-killer from the tin in her hand, although they were already dusty with it. There were bear, tiger, leopard and cheetah skins, together with a number of the scaly, delicately tinted skins of various snakes.

Ernest examined them with interest. Once, these had all covered living flesh and bones, and had

careered over the plains and mountains, or crept about in the thick jungles. What a much better life than that of the animals in the Zoo!

"Where do they all come from?" he asked.

"The Squire shot a lot of them in India, and others belong to his nephew the Captain—Miss Warfelton's cousin. I suppose he will come home some day and clear them out."

"Was Mr. Warfelton in India, then?"

"Why, yes. He was an engineer, and I suppose he has built some wonderful bridges in his time. It was he who shot that big tiger you stumbled over in the drawing-room. The natives came and told Sahib that there was a man-eater about, and Sahib, who was the only white man there, took his rifle and went out alone and shot him."

"Wasn't it awfully dangerous?"

"Of course! But he had to do it to keep up his prestige. They expected it of him."

"I see."

She crossed the room and threw open a window. "Just one breath of air," she said. "It has to be kept shut on account of moths. Look, what a lovely view!"

Ernest leant out as far as he could, and a puff of fresh air slipped past him into the close room with its pungent odor. From this height, he could see right over the creek, while straight in front, at the foot of the steep potato field, lay the marsh, cut into sections. Tredinnick's cows were grazing there; he could distinguish each of the three perfectly. On the right, he looked over the top of a belt of trees to an orchard on the hill beyond. It was marvellous how the view opened out from this window on the second story; he could not tear himself away from the glimpse of wider country that lay outside the domain of Marraton.

But Mrs. Parracomb was waiting. Reluctantly, he drew in his head and shut the window for her; then he followed her silently down the stairs. Strange! He had always thought of the Squire as at Marraton, but now he had to readjust his ideas. Not always had the Master of this ancient house led this tranquil, rural existence. He had crossed the seas, and climbed the mighty mountains of India, and built bridges across its rivers, and fought with wild beasts in its jungles. Life at Marraton was spacious compared with Ernest's life in London, but there was a

life more spacious still. And Mr. Warfelton had known it—he too like the New Zealand soldier and the Canadian adventurer—although he sat so still and peaceful now.

At the foot of the stairs Mrs. Parracomb paused. How pretty she looked as the broad beam of light from the open hall door fell upon her bright face and glossy black hair!

Mr. Warfelton, supported by his stick, was saying good-by to the Professor in the porch. He had not exactly dismissed him, but he had given him to understand that at five minutes to the hour he should have to brush his top hat and put on his gloves, since the carriage had been ordered punctually at six and he never kept Pony Pat waiting.

It was now a quarter to six, and he beckoned to Ernest, and walked before him a little shakily into the library. "Ten minutes more," he said, and sat down in his armchair. On the table at his side lay a top hat, a clothes-brush, a pair of gloves, a prayer-book and a threepenny bit. Miss Warfelton had put them all ready before going to dress for church herself.

"Ten more minutes," repeated the Squire. "Take

a chair, Ernie. Well, how are you getting on at Bunny's House? Learnt to milk yet?"

"Oh yes! Sir."

"And to shoot rabbits?"

"I haven't hit one yet," confessed Ernest, "and there don't seem so many round there after all, considering the name of the house. I think there are more up your way, Sir."

"But, young man, Tredinnick's farm isn't called Bunny's House on account of the rabbits, but on account of a man named Bunny who once lived there."

"I never heard that," said Ernest.

"That's odd—especially as it's your second visit. Yes, there was a man named Bunny who used once to be in charge of the lime-kiln in the field down by the creek. Haven't you noticed that disused lime-kiln? And a queer old chap he was, by all accounts. He lived by himself in the house by the water—it wasn't so big in those days, before my dear Granddad had built on the dairy and wash-house and back kitchen."

"What became of him?"

"Of Bunny? The tale runs that he was found dead in his bed one morning; and another tale says that his ghost haunts the foot-path that skirts the creek.

But I've never seen it. However, he seems to have been queer enough for anything, poor old chap, though harmless enough too. Maybe he had religious mania—he used to come up of a night and pray in the brambles at the back of the house here, where there was once a chapel. Must have been a bit touched, you know, to live like that all by himself. It's lonely enough down by the creek in the winter. Some people think it's lonely here."

"It must be very quiet," said Ernest. "I suppose you read in the evenings," and his eyes wandered to the walls lined with books.

"Yes, I read, but then you see, Master Ernest, old eyes and paraffin lamps don't agree for very long at a time."

"If I were here I should like to read to you—that is, if I could do it well enough."

"Ceta reads to me, bless her! But very often I tell her to close the book. For an old man like me has only to shut his eyes to see far more interesting things than ever he can read in a book. I've seen so much—it's better than any book. The young don't understand."

"I think I understand."

"You may, although you're a Londoner. And that reminds me, I suppose you don't know of a tidy sharp lad who can write nicely and milk cows—or learn to milk them as quickly as you've done—and who perhaps would be all the better for a little air and milk and cider, all of which are very fortifying? Tredinick wants help badly, and so do I. A young fellow with fair health, and who yet didn't happen to have lungs for an office, might very well turn into a man here. But, mind you! he mustn't only aspire to be a mere money-spinner. In towns, people are all for getting on, and that's all right for them, and it's one way out of drudgery. But down here there's only the prospect of becoming a small holder—to my mind, there's no saner life."

The Squire paused. "I speak as a countryman," he concluded.

Ernest's hesitating eyes met his. "If I stay with my firm I'm fixed up for life," he said slowly. "And some men do get on and make money on the Corn Exchange."

Mr. Warfelton nodded. "I know," he said. "Good luck! Don't think I want to unsettle you if you're content. But bear my offer in mind if you

come across any likely youth that isn't. And take care of yourself. Don't stay away for years, and then come down here looking like a limp bit of seaweed. There's room at Marraton if ever Bunny's House is full."

"Oh, Sir!" cried Ernest, "you're awfully good to me!"

A distant bark was heard. It was Harry's dog jumping up at Pat's nose as the pony was led out of the yard.

"I must get ready—good evening!" said the Squire. He did not ask if Ernest were going to church.

The lad sauntered back to Bunny's House, loitering in the avenue to read a few more pages of *Barnaby Rudge*. But they did not hold his attention. He was thinking of the lonely man called Bunny, who so often must have passed beneath these trees on his way to pray among the brambles, and of the happy face of the old Squire, who liked to close his eyes, and read once more in the long scroll of memory the stories that were twined about his past.

CHAPTER XI

"A Thought of Grief."

"**D**EAR, dear!" said Mrs. Tredinnick. "The poor Squire's all in a muddle. 'Tisn't Bunny that walks the path by the creek—Squire has got him all mixed up with the murdered smuggler who holds his head in his hands. That's the worst of old people—they can't keep things straight in their heads." So grumbled the farmer's wife, quite forgetting that she was herself only a very few years younger than the Squire.

"The skins are all right," she continued, "though the Captain had better have tried to get hold of some dead cows and goats to make into boots and gaiters. That's what we want in these days. I call all that fancy stuff waste. And the idea of telling you about the chapel!—there's no chapel there that ever I heard of. How can there be a chapel where there's nothing but nettles and brambles? Now if they'd taken you to see the tomb, there'd have been some sense in it.

A Christian buried in a field—that is a curiosity. There's nothing curious about old skins except the smell. And then there's our village well that never runs dry. I wonder they didn't take you to church and show you that on the road. I should have been at church myself this evening if it hadn't been that Pansy's going to calve. They don't seem to have shown you anything—I quite thought they were attending to you. Why, you'll go home without knowing a thing. It's too late now, but the first evening I can get hold of a spare half-hour, I declare I'll take you to the Christian's tomb myself."

It happened that two evenings later Mrs. Tredinick did find herself able to "get hold of a spare half-hour," and after the milking was done and the fowls were put to bed, she took off her big apron, put on her second best hat, and called to Ernest, who had just come back from Marraton, to accompany her.

One behind the other, they climbed the orchard path, and then went through a gate into the lane which led past the back entrance to Marraton, and connected Bunny's House and Quay with the village. They

turned to the right through another gate, crossed one of the Marraton orchards, and so came out into a big field of wheat that sloped up to the horizon. Low though it was as yet, it rippled into diminutive waves of delicate green under the light caress of the westerly breeze. They skirted the hedge so as to avoid trampling down the rising crop, and came at last into another big field, of grass this time, and easy walking, for, as Mrs. Tredinnick said, "grass don't have a chance to grow high in a stocked field, especially with such eating cows as they." The cows lifted lazy heads as they passed, gazed at them for a minute or two with leisurely curiosity, and then turned again to their browsing and chewing. Towards the middle of the field was the Christian's grave.

It was a tomb about twelve feet high, substantially built of solid square blocks of granite, and inclosed by iron railings. Ernest peered inquisitively at the inscription on the marble slab, which after a century and a half was becoming difficult to read. At first he could only make out the name and the date and a word here and there, but at length he succeeded in piecing it all together and reading it out to Mrs. Tredinnick:—

“HERE LYETH the body of WILLIAM MARTYN, of the Borough of Plymouth, in the County of Devon, Doctor of Physick, who died the 22nd day of November, in the year of our Lord Jesus Christ 1762, aged 62 years. He was an honest, good-natured man, willing to do all the good in his power to all mankind; and not willing to hurt any person. He lived and died a Catholick Christian, in the true not depraved Popish sense of the word, had no superstitious veneration for Church or Churchyard ground, and willing by his example if that might have any influence to lessen the unreasonable esteem which some poor men and women through prejudice of education, often show for it in frequently parting with the earnings of many a hard day's labour, which might be better bestowed in sustenance for themselves and families, to pay for Holy beds for their kinsfolk's corpses, through a ridiculous fear lest their kinsfolk at the Day of Judgement should some way or other suffer because their corpses were wrongly situated, or not where the worldly advantage of their spiritual guides loudly called for them.”

“There's maybe a shade of sense in it,” admitted Mrs. Tredinnick. “But give me the churchyard to lie in; not this corner of the last field that God made! 'Tisn't even good soil.”

“It's queer,” said Ernest, employing a favorite

expression of his for anything that lay outside his experience. Presently he asked: "Will it always be there? Won't anyone take it away?"

"They mayn't. He made sure of that in his will."

They retraced their steps, Ernest thinking of the strange Christian and his whim. There was something after all in his point of view. What did it matter, when one was dead? Wasn't it common sense, in a world where money was hard to come by, to spend it on the living and not on the dead? He could not decide, because at the back of his mind, and in conflict with the matter-of-fact bent of his nature, was a lurking sentiment about Mr. Jack. Most assuredly, he would have given the Lieutenant a "Holy bed," and even fallen into other "superstitions" had it been in his power. But then Mr. Jack was not just an ordinary dead person.

"Eh!" he exclaimed, stooping suddenly. "That's a queer sort of beetle!" It was one more queer thing in a very odd world.

"It's a hornywink," Mrs. Tredinnick told him.

"Whatever's that?"

"Cold doesn't kill it—it lives through the winter."

Winter! This started another train of thought.

"I should like to see Bunny's House in winter," he remarked a little wistfully, "just for once. What's it like?"

Mrs. Tredinnick reflected. She had to think before she could explain to a Londoner what Bunny's House was like in winter. But Ernest, whose mind moved quickly, followed up his first remark by another:

"It must be cold and dark."

"But it's not," she replied, with a suspicion of indignation. "There's lots of wood, and we have fires right up the chimneys. And there's no snow outside, only rain. And no matter how hard it rains, you lie snug and warm in your plumb tie."

"Plumb tie!" ejaculated Ernest. "What's that?"

"Bless the boy! Your bed, to be sure. Where you sleep at night. What would you call it then?"

"I should call it my 'bed,'" replied Ernest. "Feather beds, you have here."

"Feather beds!" ejaculated Mrs. Tredinnick scornfully. "Why *feather* beds? You wouldn't speak of *mattress* beds, would you? They are ties, and when I make them of a morning, I shake them up and make them plumb. Plumb ties! You tried to make your own the other day, and I had to do

it all over again—it wasn't a bit plumb."

"A plum is a fruit," said Ernest, puzzled.

"A plum is a fruit, but a bed is plumb, and bread is plumb," persisted the old lady, growing ruffled. "You seem to have had a nice fore-and-back kind of education at your school, learning all sorts of useless words and yet not knowing what to call your own bed! But I never did think much of London schools."

Mrs. Tredinnick did not like to be criticized, even by Ernest, who was a favorite. If there was any criticism to be administered, she preferred to administer it herself. But Ernest too was opiniative; and although he gave one of his fleeting nervous smiles and dropped the subject, he was quite determined that however long he stayed at Bunny's House, he would never call his bed a "plumb tie." He considered it an extremely foolish expression, and, moreover, the drastic condemnation of his education annoyed him. Thus the walk that had begun so peacefully threatened to end on a note of perturbation.

However, Mrs. Tredinnick said: "We'll go home by the Serpentine. The Squire won't mind."

The Serpentine was a very grand place to her. The path ran parallel to the lane, and led through

the Marraton grounds from the lodge, now let to a small holder, to the main entrance to the drive, which was not far from the house. There, you could regain the lane by the drive gate, and follow it past the back of Marraton down to Bunny's Quay; or, if you preferred it, you might walk on up the drive, pass in front of the house, and so gain the wicket gate that led into the avenue, where only a hedge separated you from the lane. Mrs. Tredinnick intended, of course, to go back into the public lane at the drive gate; but, as I have said, the Serpentine was a grand place, in her eyes, and she knew that neither the old Squire nor Miss Warfelton would object to her walking through it and looking at the goldfish who shared their home beneath the water-lilies with a colony of frogs. Ernest leant over the water and watched them navigate below the surface like small golden-red submarines. Mrs. Tredinnick watched too for a minute, and then she said:

"See the bees? They're a stray swarm that came last year—that means luck."

The bees were roughly housed in an ordinary wooden box supported on four stakes. The old lady planted herself in front of it, and said softly:—

"Ernest Grills is going home next week—the Squire'll miss him, and so shall I and Father. . . . Young Tom's safe so far, we had a letter this morning. . . . The black kitten up to Marraton is lost in the woods. . . . Miss Sisceta has had to take to glasses. . . ."

She turned, and caught Ernest's apprehensive gaze. "Well, what's the matter with you?" she demanded. "Haven't you ever heard anybody talk to bees before?"

"I never have," he replied with truth.

"If you don't tell the bees the family business, they won't stop," announced Mrs. Tredinnick. "And Miss Sisceta, she's too busy, and Mrs. Parracomb laughs."

"I understand," said Ernest. All his annoyance melted away. He felt pleased that his old friend should regard his departure as family business, touching both Bunny's House and Marraton.

"Bees are awkward creatures to manage," she pursued reflectively.

"So I should think," said Ernest with conviction. "I've never had anything to do with them myself."

"But you could learn," she told him quickly.

"You could learn that and lots of other things if you didn't go back to London. Why can't you stop till Tom comes home?"

Ernest gave one glance at the wrinkled face, quaint now in its anxiety, quainter still when it smiled. He considered for a brief space, then said with energy:

"But it wouldn't be sense. I've my future to think of."

The next moment the thought came to him: Suppose her son never did come back! The same thought had come, as often before, to Mrs. Tredinick too, but she never admitted it—it was too dreadful a thought to admit.

She did not press the point further, but he felt that she was sad. And he too was sorry to have to seem disobliging and ungrateful. He would have done very well, he knew, for a stop-gap son, till young Tom came home. Life had a way of forcing horrid situations upon one, but he clung to his one sure foothold of "sense."

The evening sunshine, obscured by a passing cloud, flashed out again, and lighted up the arresting form of Mrs. Parracomb advancing to meet them. Both the old woman and the youth were glad.

"Good evening!" she called. "Have you been for a walk?"

She held Mrs. Tredinnick's hand and looked very kindly into the old face, and she appeared quite interested to hear that Ernest had now seen almost everything: "the Christian's grave, and the goldfish, and the bees—everything except the holy well."

"Perhaps," suggested the lad shyly, "you would show it to me on Sunday on the way home from church."

"I don't go to church," she replied quietly. "But certainly I will show it to you. When shall it be? There's time now, isn't there, Mrs. Tredinnick? Shall it be now?"

But Mrs. Tredinnick was too tired to go back on her steps, and besides, she wanted to light up the fire to warm the pasties for supper.

"But Ernie can go, if you've time to take him, my dear," she proposed.

Impulsively, Mrs. Parracomb decided that she had time. Presently, she would have to read to Mr. Warfelton, but it did not matter for half-an-hour. "We shall do it in half-an-hour if we run," she said.

They ran. Mrs. Parracomb led the way, and

Ernest followed obediently behind. He made a dart forward to open the gate at the end of the Serpentine, but then fell back again in order to allow her to act as pioneer. They passed a villager, who looked at them for a moment with startled eyes, and then, reassured by Mrs. Parracomb's laughing face, went on his meditative way. The neighbors were fast ceasing to be surprised at the vagaries of the new housekeeper at Marraton. Up the lane sped the pair, their pace growing more leisurely as the hill steepened, until they came to the school, which was on the outskirts of the village. Behind this was the "bid well" or holy well, which had never been known to run dry. Fastened to the ledge by a chain was a small cup placed there for the use of the school-children, and above the ledge, in a niche, was a statue of the Blessed Virgin.

"Drink!" said Mrs. Parracomb, and Ernest drank.

"I suppose it's very old?" he queried.

"The well is, not the statue. Mr. Warfelton put that there. It's rather a pretty one of Our Lady, don't you think so?"

"Yes, it's pretty," agreed Ernest. "But why did he put it there?"

"Because there was an empty niche, and he knew it must once have held some statue; and as the church is dedicated to St. Mary the Virgin, he concluded it would probably be one of Our Lady. See? Very likely it was destroyed at the Reformation."

Ernest nodded his head wisely, and a faint echo of things he had once heard at history lessons sounded through the corridors of his mind.

They turned to go home, but although it was now down hill, they did not run; on the contrary, they walked slowly, almost loitered. At one point, where the road bends, there is a lovely view of hilly green fields sloping down to the marsh and creek, with a wooded height on the right dropping sheer into the water, and beyond, the low blue line of Dartmoor. They paused, and Mrs. Parracomb drew a long breath.

"It's so beautiful," she murmured, "and it makes me sad."

"I'm sad to leave it," said Ernest. "I don't think I should be sad if I could stay."

"I'm sad because it reminds me of things," she explained.

"It seems only like itself to me, it doesn't remind

me of anything—I never saw anything like it.”

“Brittany is rather like it,” she said. “And I was there once.”

She glanced at him and met his eyes, which were interested, half pleading, as though he would have liked to say: “Please talk to me and tell me things.”

“In Brittany,” she told him, “you often come upon a shrine with an old statue of some saint or of Our Lady. And in the middle of the village where I stayed was a big Calvary, and in the church peasants were always praying. But here, in Cornwall, though the landscape is so like in parts and the villages are named after just such funny old saints, yet somehow (perhaps I am misjudging the people) God seems left out of His own beautiful world.”

Ernest reflected, and his face took on its contrary look.

“Why do you say such a thing because there are no images? I don’t care about images.”

“No?” she commented. “Still, they put a finishing touch to the landscape.”

“I don’t think so,” he persisted. “I don’t care about images—they’re not English. And it isn’t fair

to say God is forgotten just because there are no images."

"His friends are—His Mother is," she whispered. Then, as he was silent, she continued: "Besides, we had it all once—all we could need and want. England was 'Our Lady's Dowry' and the 'Isle of Saints' once. And we've lost it. Can't you understand how that is a thought that grieves me?"

The laughing archness faded from her face, which was now grave with the wistful gravity of a child, and, with a leap of sympathy, Ernest answered:

"I think I understand. It all seems empty to you."

She nodded. "Yes, like the churches. But I don't mean that exactly, for of course God is everywhere."

"I know what you mean," he repeated, "because I once had a friend who talked something like that. But then he became a Catholic."

"I am a Catholic."

"Oh!" he cried joyfully. "I'm so glad. So that's why you don't go to church?"

"I go to Mass at Saltash when I can—not always, because it's so far. But why are you glad?"

"Because I felt vexed when you told me you didn't go to church. I don't go myself—I don't believe—at least, I don't know what to think about that sort of thing. But I like other people to go, somehow—especially women."

"I see, Mr. Grills."

"Now you're offended, but I don't mean any harm. Do you know, I believe I understand you better than you understand me."

Her face softened immediately, and she looked at him with the benevolent consideration of an elder sister for a very small brother.

"But perhaps I, too, understand," she said. "Perhaps, just because you don't believe yourself, it's a comfort to you to feel that someone else does."

"I suppose that is the reason," said Ernest thoughtfully.

"Oh!" she exclaimed suddenly. "But it must be late—late! And the Squire will be waiting—and he's such a dear, he never grumbles. I'm sorry, but we must really run again. Do you mind?"

They ran helter-skelter down the hill, but he out-distanced her this time and had to wait by the Serpentine gate till she came up.

"How fast you run!" she gasped. "Let us rest on the seat by the goldfish for a few minutes till I recover. I can't go in like this."

They sat down side by side, and Mrs. Parracomb broke off a laurel branch and fanned her flushed, hot face with it.

"Must you really go home next week?" she asked.

"Yes," he explained. "You see I've a good Boss and a good place. It wouldn't be sense to risk losing it, for," (he concluded proudly) "I may say I'm fixed up for life."

"How awful!" she murmured. "It's just like prison."

Ernest looked at her, puzzled. It had never occurred to him to think of his future in this light. To be "fixed up for life" seemed to him a most satisfactory state of affairs. He began to suspect that Mrs. Parracomb was not a very reasonable being. And yet she appeared to possess a certain instinctive and uncanny penetration that made him want to hear her opinion.

"Sometimes I feel a bit of a brute for going," he said slowly. "Mrs. Tredinnick has been awfully good to me."

"She loves you, you see."

Ernest felt awkward and uncomfortable.

"You're thinking that you can't repay her—now. But you can't ever repay her except by love. Don't leave her again for years without a letter."

So she knew that!

But she did not notice his shame. From the silken bag hanging at her side she had drawn a tiny mirror and was ruefully examining the reflection of her face in it.

"What a sight I am!" she exclaimed. And first she adjusted an unruly curl, and then with a powder puff she delicately dabbed her moist and heated cheeks. When she had finished, she glanced at Ernest once more, and something in his expression made her say:

"It's not wrong."

"Of course not."

"But you think it's silly of me?"

"No, I don't. Maud used to do it."

"Who was Maud?" she inquired.

"She was my young lady."

Mrs. Parracomb jumped up hastily. Suddenly, she thought Ernest a very stupid boy. She was

vexed with him because of the shade of disappointment and disapprobation on his tell-tale face. She resented being compared to his "young lady." Besides, the Squire had really been kept waiting a long time.

It was late before Ernest got into bed that night. He knelt upon his favorite window-seat, listening once again to the sounds behind the stillness. The open space in front of the farmhouse lay clear and white in the moonbeams. He could see the ruts and stones in the path quite plainly. The stagnant pond where the ducks loved to swim looked pure and beautiful under the eerie spell of the silvery light; only from its odor could he have guessed that it was stagnant. All these little familiar details had become very dear to Ernest.

"Perhaps I might as well stop," he reflected. "After all, I don't see why I should be in prison all my life."

He undressed deliberately, folding up his clothes and laying them neatly on the wooden chair that Mrs. Tredinnick had placed by his bedside for the purpose. One morning when she called him she had scolded him for flinging his socks upon the floor. To-night,

he hung them over the back of the chair, and then he climbed into the big bed with a comfortable feeling of proprietorship. Bunny's House would be his home now, and for a long time, perhaps. The moonlight streamed into the room, illuminating a spider's web that swung from a rafter in the corner. The delicate, shimmering tracery swayed to and fro in the breeze from the window. What a state Mrs. Tredinnick would be in when he told her of the cobweb! It was true she could not see very well now. *Crunch-crunch*, went the greedy mare. Ernest wondered if she went on munching the whole night through. There would be plenty of men glad to take his position at Turners. And his father would have to be satisfied with Algy—whose fingers were big, to be sure, though he wasn't so clumsy as might have been expected, and was at any rate a chap who didn't mind doing what he was told. And it would be a fine thing for Emmy—presently those two would be able to get married.

How the frogs were croaking down in the marsh tonight! And how surprised the New Zealander would be if he knew! An owl screeched. . . . Then another. . . .

CHAPTER XII

“Who Shall Be My Guide?”

IN THE old days when the Manor of Marraton was in the possession of the Talbot family, the Head of the house built a chapel, and a certain Bishop Lacy granted the license. It is recorded that on the sixth day of December, in the year 1452, it was dedicated to the Most Holy Trinity. To-day, grasses and nettles and brambles hide the spot where in the past the Holy Sacrifice was offered, and where so often, in sorrow or in joy, those of our English race whose lives were centered round the Manor knelt in prayer. And yet we are compelled to believe that a place where such stupendous mysteries have been enacted can never be the same as places that have been less honored. Though the rubbish of the centuries be heaped upon it, still, in some way unrecognized by us, it must be hallowed. Men may not reverence it, they may not even know about it. That matters little except to them—they are the losers.

God gets His honor: He has His Angels. And often it so happens that He has stray human worshipers as well. Strange, how they turn up! At Marraton there had been Bunny: now there was Mary Parracomb.

Bunny was fast becoming a legendary character. There was no one left who had a personal remembrance of him. The Squire had it from Grandfather Warfelton that he was a curious, unkempt fellow, unsociable; preferring to keep to himself, perhaps hiding some secret. He was a man of prayer, to judge by the report of his nocturnal watchings, but no odor of sanctity clung about his memory. He was probably told about the chapel by the Squire of his day; but why he went to pray there, if he aimed at adoration or repentance, and whether he was of the old Faith or not, are questions likely ever to remain unanswered. His lonely life ended in a lonely death, and already popular remembrance, as we have seen, was beginning to confuse him with a headless smuggler. This at least is beyond dispute: Bunny had been in the habit of going to say his prayers on the site of the old chapel.

And now Mrs. Parracomb followed in his steps

—although after a long interval, and without his reputed regularity. Still, to the chapel she occasionally went, and it was to her a source of consolation to remember that another human being had frequented the overgrown and desolate corner before her. It gave her a sense of solidarity. She was not alone, even from a human point of view: Bunny had preceded her. He seemed much nearer to her—as indeed he was in point of time—than the pious founders of the chapel. She remembered his soul when she forgot theirs.

The growing hardihood of the brambles distressed her. The Squire had once promised her that Harry should cut them down and lay bare the foundation stones that he distinctly remembered having seen in his youth. But Harry never had time for any but the most utilitarian work. Now, it occurred to her to enlist the sympathies of Ernest.

Ernest was glad to be consulted, and readily promised help. Not that he cared much about ancient days or the chapel and its associations, but he did care about obliging the Marraton Housekeeper. The youthfulness of her spirit, her enthusiasm, her unexpectedness, called to something in him. Ernest

was a faithful follower: as he had followed the Lieutenant, so now he followed Mrs. Parracomb. He did not always approve; the trying months that lay behind him had brought with them an ever growing share of his characteristic English tendency to grumble and to criticize, yet his allegiance, once it had been given, was not prone to falter.

And it was not surprising that the allegiance of the adolescent should gravitate to this attractive and good-natured woman. She was so young—a decade and a half behind her years at least—and all else in Bunny's House and Marraton was mellow. There was Harry, to be sure, but Harry liked to spend his hours of leisure at the cinema in Saltash—an entertainment which the spoilt child of the great Capital affected to regard as no better than a Punch and Judy show. Ernest felt years older than Harry; there were days when he felt older even than Mrs. Parracomb, for she was a creature of moods, and moods are not invariably reasonable. But always she was very good to look upon, and her sympathies were extraordinarily quick, her insight almost faultless. Even to Ernest's inexperienced eyes it was evident that she was better dressed than her employers; he did not

know that this was due to the discarded garments of more fortunate friends, nor did Miss Warfelton herself suspect how often her assistant went without what was really necessary in order that the little girl at school might be well and warmly clad.

And yet again and again did Mrs. Parracomb forget her troubles during that radiant Cornish spring. It would have been difficult not to be happy in so beautiful a world, and with people so kind and considerate. Sisceta in particular would have done anything she could to help her; that, she knew; but pride and delicacy of feeling enabled her to keep her worries mostly to herself. Besides, the Warfeltons, although they lived in quiet comfort, were not people with a big Bank balance.

Ernest was a decided acquisition. At their very first interview she had summed him up as a nice boy and a good one. Often, however, she could not help teasing him, and sometimes only with an effort did she pull up in time to prevent his getting huffy. The Squire had arranged that he should work for the Tredinnicks for the first half of the day, and in this manner he earned his board. In the afternoon and early evening he spent some hours at Marraton, help-

ing to keep the accounts of the estate; writing letters, labels, and dispatch notes; superintending the forwarding of any surplus produce to Plymouth or Covent Garden; and taking the Squire out in his wheeled-chair. For all this he received a modest weekly sum, but he was quite satisfied, since day by day he felt his health and muscles growing stronger. And then, was he not being initiated into the mysteries of farming? Some day, when he was old and wise, he would have a house of his own, a little fruit-holding of his own, shooting of his own, and a trap. Very quickly he accepted, along with the open-air life and the good fare, the ideals and aspirations of those with whom his lot was now cast.

The Squire had helped him to compose the necessary letter to Mr. John Turner, and he had received a formal but kind missive in reply, regretting his decision but opining that, in view of all the circumstances, it might be a wise one. Ernest was relieved; he liked things to be settled on terms of good feeling, and then he had a certain sentimental regard for the father of his dead friend. What his own father thought about the matter was not so easy to find out, for the Grills family were not people who

wrote letters. However, as presently he received an invitation by picture postcard to the wedding of Emmy and Algy, he concluded that the Head of his house had not utterly cast him off. After consulting Mr. Warfelton, he decided to go, not so much for the sake of seeing his sister married—which indeed he openly characterized as a “bore”—but because he wanted, as he put it, to “get hold of his traps” and bring them to Bunny’s House. It had proved useless to write for them, and he did not feel inclined to let Algy succeed to a suit that had hardly been worn. Besides, there were his books.

“So it’s a mere matter of clothes, after all, that drives you back to London,” said Mrs. Parracomb thoughtfully. “Clothes! What a nuisance they are!”

She looked remarkably well dressed herself that day, and rather as if she knew the fact and enjoyed it.

“It’s not clothes altogether,” said Ernest quite seriously, “it’s other things. I want to get hold of what belongs to me, and I might as well go to my sister’s wedding. I can be spared for a week now before any hay’s cut—I shan’t be away longer.”

"How I wish I were going with you."

"Shopping?" he suggested slyly.

"Shopping! Well, yes. But not for myself—for my little Clare. And then I want to see her so much. She's such a long way off, and holidays are such a long time coming. I don't like to think of losing so much of her childhood. Do you know, Ernie, I've an idea."

"What now?" he queried, and waited. Mrs. Paracomb had such a surprising number of ideas, and he could never guess beforehand what they were likely to be.

"When you're in London you might go and see her. Should you mind? Miss Warfelton has promised her some jam, and it's so difficult to pack. And I've nearly finished her new frock—you could take that too. Oh, it would be lovely! Poor mite, she has so few visitors compared to the other children, and I know she can't help feeling it. Will you do this for me?"

"Of course I will," Ernest assured her.

"It will be quite easy for you—the school's only just outside London."

"It wouldn't matter to me how far it was."

"You're really most awfully good."

Ernest found nothing to say in reply.

She looked at him with closer attention than she had given him heretofore. Undoubtedly, he was a good lad, well disposed and helpful. There was a certain stability about him too, for all his slight frame and nervous manner. He was a great advantage in the household. It was nice to have a pleasant youth about, and then, when it came to pushing the wheeled-chair up a hill, she had discovered that he was stronger than he looked. His handwriting and figures were to her shame infinitely to be preferred to hers. But the Squire never let him read aloud, for though he was an old gentleman singularly devoid of prejudices, his ears were quick to detect a twang. And this prohibition was a disappointment to Ernest, who was ignorant of its reason, and was inclined to be proud of his scholarship.

Having arranged an unexpected treat for little Clare, Mrs. Parracomb's thoughts reverted to the question of the buried chapel.

"I did so want a bit of a clearance made," she said, "and now I suppose you won't have time to do it before you go."

"I'll make time," he declared with decision.

She gave him one of her flashing and approving smiles: "And so will I," she said.

Ernest was silent for a moment or two. It came into his mind that Mrs. Parracomb's duties did not lie very heavily upon her. She generally found time in the morning to take a few turns up and down the avenue under the beech trees that she loved. Occasionally, when he reached Marraton in the afternoon, he came upon her snoozing in a deck-chair in the sunny porch. She certainly had more leisure than Miss Warfelton, but then Miss Warfelton was an employer.

"You have plenty of time," he announced, a little stiffly, self-righteously conscious that, putting Miss Warfelton out of the reckoning, his own days were more fully occupied than hers.

"Much you know about it!" she retorted.

"Well, here you are now, and it's the very middle of the morning."

"So are you here."

"But I'm on my way to Marraton to borrow the long ladder."

"And I'm on my way to Bunny's House to fetch some eggs for potting."

They both laughed.

"The truth of the matter is, you would like me always to have my nose to the grindstone," she remarked.

"No, I shouldn't, but. . . ."

"Well?" she questioned encouragingly. "What were you thinking? I like to hear people's thoughts."

He hesitated. But an easy *camaraderie* had grown up between these two, born of a similarity of circumstances. The fact of their being fellow employees had helped to bridge the gulf between the woman of refinement and the Cockney boy.

"I should be afraid, if I were you," he said at last.

"Afraid!" she echoed.

"Yes; when I was at Turners I was glad of a slack time now and then, but if it had come along too often, I should have been afraid of getting the shunt. That's what generally happens when there isn't much work."

"Then you think I ought to pretend to be busy

when I've really done everything I've got to do?" she asked scornfully.

She did not wait for him to reply.

"But pretense is hateful!" she cried. "And it's silly to *make* work. Don't you think your ideas are really rather stupid?"

No, not stupid! Ernest's fighting London spirit rose. He was not going to have such terms as "pretense," "silly," and "stupid," hurled at any line of conduct which commended itself to him.

He waved his arm with a comprehensive gesture which embraced the beech-trees, the marsh, the wicket-gate that led to the untidy gardens, and the old gray mansion, under-staffed and spacious:

"There's work here for twenty-four hours in every day without *making* it," he declared.

At that moment, from the direction in which he pointed, came the unmistakable sound of a vigorous beating of carpets. Ever so slightly Mrs. Parracomb flushed.

"They're spring-cleaning the study," she said. "I must go and help—Miss Warfelton does far too much. I felt very cross with you a minute ago, but after all, I do believe you're right. I so easily slip into being

lazy and selfish, but now I'm going to be good and work very, very hard."

Ernest gave a shame-faced glance into her candid, childlike eyes. He knew that he had been a brute and insufferably rude as well. The word "priggish" had no place in his vocabulary, but if its meaning had been adequately explained to him, he would readily have admitted that it was applicable to him. Disarmed by the simplicity and humility of one so far above him, he looked at her imploringly, and said:

"I'll bring the sickle and the big shears this afternoon and cut down those brambles for you."

It was his way of making an apology. He did not do it more explicitly because he was so very far from perfect.

But what he failed to state in words he strove with all his might to express in deeds. Armed with an old sickle, he hacked manfully at the weeds and brambles that had conquered the desolate waste corner of the orchard behind the house. He was not skilled at the work, and very quickly his arms began to ache. Still, he persevered, cutting and slashing and trampling down as best he could with a little

dilatory aid from Mrs. Parracomb, who was all animation, and had quite recovered from the ruffled interview of the morning. Ernest scratched his arms and legs and stung his hands, but at length he was rewarded by the sight of a solid block of stone. He rested from his labors, while Mrs. Parracomb knelt upon a heap of nettles:

"Oh!" she cried, "there it is! That must be part of the foundations. Perhaps the Altar stood here."

Ernest was glad that she was pleased, but he could not enter into her feelings.

"Isn't it wonderful," she murmured, "all that it means—all that went on here? How sorry I am, and how happy!"

Although Ernest did not sympathize with all this fuss about a few old stones, he would not for the world have said so. He had had enough of criticizing for one day.

But Mary Parracomb rose to her feet and looked at her companion gratefully, even affectionately. She had, unlike Ernest, forgotten about the morning; and, indeed, she would have been the last person in the world to bear rancor because when she had asked for his opinion he had given it, perhaps a little over

frankly, without regard for manners or respect. He was always to her a "nice, dear boy"; she remembered his honest nature, his chaotic unbelief, his dead friend, and with all her heart she pitied him and wanted to do him a good turn.

"Ernie," she said, "don't you ever say a prayer?"

He shook his head.

"But you should," she told him. "It's such a help—I don't like to think of you going through life without that help."

"I would rather you said it for me," he answered in a low voice, speaking shyly and with an effort.

"I do, of course. But you should pray for yourself. God is very good, but He likes us to speak to Him. You say you do not know if He is there. Surely, you ought to try and find out. If He is there, and you keep on asking, some day He will answer. Doesn't that seem reasonable?" Skillfully, she appealed to his love of what he called "sense."

He nodded.

"I'm going to tell you a little short prayer to say every day—just a tiny one. I believe it's very old; anyway, I heard some school-children sing it once to a weird sort of chant, and I've never forgotten

it. I say it often; won't you say it too—this prayer that our fathers used to say?"

Ernest promised. Her interest in him, her solicitude for him, gave him a strange new feeling of elation. Besides, it seemed to him quite a reasonable proposition to repeat a prayer commended by Mrs. Parracomb and the usage of bygone ages.

"It's only this," she said, crossing herself:

*"Who shall be my Guide? The Blessed Trinity,
The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.'"*

Again she repeated it, and yet again, three times in all, her voice almost a whisper:

*"Who shall be my guide? The Blessed Trinity,
The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.'"*

Once again, the voice of prayer rose upon the ancient site. Once again, the august Name of the Most Holy Trinity was invoked over the very stones that bore witness to the celebration of the Divine Mysteries. The simple, old-time words linked the woman and the boy to the glorious past, and to Bunny the lonely and the half distraught. Then

and there, faith teaches that an answering grace descended; while the dangers, cares, and difficulties of deserts yet to cross were referred to the majestic yet familiar Guide of man. But Past, Present, and Future are terms of Time, and prayer transcends Time. And so they were all there: the Talbots and the Daunays, and Bunny and Mary Parracomb and Ernest—all gathered together in the presence of the Eternal, “to Whom nought of the future is wanting, and from Whom nought of the past has flowed away.”

CHAPTER XIII

"Milizia del Ciel."

ERNEST was knocking at the door of the convent. Tucked under his left arm was a brown paper parcel. He tried not to crush it, for within its folds, wrapped in three layers of tissue paper, was the new frock. In addition, he carried a big square cardboard box, and this was heavy, for it contained cake and jam, not to speak of a specimen pot of honey provided by the wandering bees who had decided, for a time at least, to settle in the Serpentine. The honey was causing Ernest a considerable amount of anxiety—that or the jam, he could not quite determine which. For an ever-spreading damp sticky patch was beginning to appear round about the least substantial corner of the box. He was ardently desirous of handing it over before it should commence to drip.

Fortunately, he had not long to wait. The door was opened by a middle-aged Sister with a rather

full, placid face, over which rippled now and again a most unexpected and delightful smile. Ernest stated that he had come to see Miss Clare Parracomb, and presented the card of introduction which he had brought with him.

The Sister beamed: "Mrs. Parracomb has written—we were expecting you," she said, and she led the way to the "Parlor." As he did not recognize the strong Lancashire accent, he wrongly concluded that she was a foreigner.

It was quite a little room, for it was quite a little school, but the word *parloir* called up in the worthy Sister's mind a picture of the lofty, bare, yet elegant apartment of the Mother House in France, into which it had once been her pride to usher the relations and the friends of the three hundred and more boarders. Even to-day, despite the tragic change in her environment, it was not without a distinct sensation of triumph that she flung open the door of the diminutive "parlor." Though small and bare, it was so obviously spotless.

There was an oblong table in the middle of the room, three cane-seated chairs, and two semi-arm-chairs covered in crimson plush. Of course, without

these last it would not have been a *parloir*. Ernest sat down on one of the cane-seated chairs, and laid his brown paper parcel upon the tapestry table-cloth that was a veritable bit of France. But he kept the cardboard box upon his knee—not even on the carpetless floor would he have liked to leave the tiniest of sticky marks. He hoped sincerely that Miss Clare Parracomb would quickly come. Meanwhile, his eyes wandered from the big crucifix above the mantel-piece to the window on the right, through which he could perceive the forms of some half-dozen little pupils. They were clad in black overalls; and they chattered and played beneath the plane-trees of the suburban yard-garden, without a thought of the noble park and cloisters of the exiled Order that was teaching them to read and write and sew. How should they miss what they had never known—what far surpassed their wildest dreams?

But the door swung open hesitatingly and a little girl peeped round the corner. She had a pale, elfish face, dark untidy hair which the restraining ribbon failed to hold, and big eyes that in certain lights were black. She could not make up her mind to enter, but stood nervously twirling the door-handle

and glancing from the parcel on the table to the box on Ernest's knee.

"Good afternoon," said Ernest. "You're Clare, aren't you? Please, do make haste—the jam's running out."

Thus apostrophized, she entered with a sudden jump, banging the door behind her, and clasping her hands before her in her excitement.

"Jam!" she breathed.

"Or honey—I don't know which it is, and I'm so awfully afraid of its messing up this place."

"I'll take it to Sister Patrice," said the child. "She's the one to unpack things and see that none gets lost. It would be such a pity to lose any."

Ernest was relieved when she bore the box away. At the door she paused, and cast a furtive look at the parcel on the table, and this it was, I am afraid, that brought her back.

He untied it for her—rather slowly, so as to fill up the interview, for he experienced a certain difficulty in finding things to say to the child. He told her that her mother was well and had sent her love. When the frock was unpacked, he admired it and hoped it would fit. After this, conversation

began to flag. Clare did not appear to have very much to say for herself. She eyed him insistently with a shy curiosity, and this he found embarrassing. Gradually, however, she became a little more communicative.

"You know," she informed him, "it isn't a half-holiday. But people don't often come to see me, and so Mother Francis Xavier said the Sister was to let you in whenever you came."

"Very kind of her," remarked Ernest.

"Yes, she is most awfully kind. She's a lovely nun."

He smiled. "She's a lovely nun!" It was so exactly what Mrs. Parracomb herself might have said, and it was her intonation.

"Mummy told me in her letter that you would be coming, but she didn't tell me what to call you. What shall I call you?"

Here was a problem. Ernest looked hopelessly from the crucifix to the chairs, and from the chairs to the table, with its (to him) unfamiliar covering. It certainly would not be quite the thing for this wisp of a child to call him "Ernie"; yet, in spite of his extreme youth, he hesitated to claim the formal title

"Mr. Grills." Perhaps he had a lurking apprehension that it might even sound ridiculous on her lips.

Luckily, a happy inspiration came to him.

"Call me 'Uncle Ernie,' " he said.

A radiantly sunny smile lit up the melancholy dark eyes of the child.

"Oh, how lovely!" she exclaimed. "Then I shall have an uncle too. Paula has an uncle who often comes and takes her out."

"But I'm afraid I shan't be able to come often. You see, I live a long way off, and I can only come when I have a holiday."

"What a shame!" said Clare, "but of course it can't be helped. It's not your fault." She exonerated him from blame, although she could not help looking at him regretfully.

"Fact!" Ernest agreed. "But I'll come when I can, and I'll write you some letters. Your mother thinks a lot of having letters."

"Oh! Uncle Ernie," she pleaded, "if only you'd send me some picture postcards! Mummy has sent me a lot of Saltash, but I've not got one of Plymouth yet. Do you think you could send me one of Plymouth?"

"I'm sure I could."

"And will you stick the stamp on the side where the picture is, and not on the side where you write the address? Then, when I put it in my postcard album, the postmark will show, you see. I want every card in my album to have its proper postmark showing, like the cards the Belgian girls have. That's very important. Mummy so often spoils her cards by sticking the stamps on the wrong side. But I'll fetch my album and show you, and then you'll be sure to remember."

Again she vanished, but this time she soon reappeared, and stood at Ernest's knee turning over the pages of her postcard album.

"That's a pretty view of Exeter, isn't it? But would you believe it, Mummy went and posted it at Saltash! Silly of her, wasn't it? She never can remember that every card must have its own real postmark."

"I'll remember," Ernest promised.

At this moment, very quietly and decisively, the door opened once more and a little old nun came in. Her extreme emaciation and fragility were in part concealed by the voluminous folds of her black habit,

rusty in hue from age. Her wrinkled ivory face gleamed out below the narrow white linen band across her forehead, dominated by a pair of small but strangely penetrating eyes. Struck by this apparition, Ernest rose in such haste that the album fell to the floor. Clare took a step forward, and caught at the ample motherly skirts:

"Oh! Mother Francis Xavier," she cried joyfully, "I'm so glad you've come! This is my Uncle Ernie, and he's brought me jam and cake and a new frock, and he's going to send me postcards."

Ernest looked down deprecatingly into the deep-set, discerning, steady little brown eyes that met his with so reassuring and so satisfied an expression. One glance at the young Englishman had sufficed to convince this experienced reader of souls as to his honesty and candor. The smile she gave Clare included him. They were two of her children. She was glad, very glad, that her lonely little pupil should have secured another friend. And although no words were uttered, Ernest had no misgiving as to the warmth of the welcome. She held out her hand, because she knew it was the English fashion, and shook his cordially.

"You must come and see us whenever you can," she said, with a slight foreign accent which yet did not make her seem a foreigner, nor detract from her extraordinary dignity.

Hers was a master-spirit, born to rule. Physically, Ernest felt very big and strong beside her, yet never had he been impelled to bear himself so deferentially, never had he received such an impression of power. He thought her singularly old and frail, but hardly had he been five minutes in her company, when her age was forgotten. Time could not touch her spirit. She was too tranquil for that, too sure of her cause, too firmly stayed upon a strength other than her own. And so she dominated Time and the things of Time, not they her. The fleeting moments could not ruffle her, nor the triumph for a day of injustice. Sixty years of cloistered life, of unceasing spiritual warfare, of heroic discharge of the duties of her vocation, had gone to the acquiring of this more than earthly calm. But she had paid the price for it. Like Dante's Crusading ancestor she might have said: "I came from martyrdom unto this peace." For she too was a Crusader, and the blood of fallen Crusaders flowed in her

veins. To-day, her courteous interest did not flag as she listened to the prattle of little Clare giving the history of each individual postcard. She listened with those same quick ears that had been deafened for a while by the thunder of the guns, by the explosion of the shells around her native cathedral. And more dreadful things than these she had known. But for all that, she could still turn her thoughts to the insignificant details of daily life; she could still smile; she had not lost her facility of repartee. And yet at times how grave and still her face! At this moment, however, it was all animation. Her mind was intent on her difficult, wayward charge, and on the foreign lad to whom her sympathies went out because he lacked the priceless gift of faith. She was preoccupied with the duties on hand, with the companions of the moment. For she was a born missionary, this indomitable little old nun. The missionary spirit was in her very bones. At this self-same hour, a younger brother was leading the austere life of a Trappist, his vow of perpetual silence towards men giving him the more time to speak to God, to plead for his country and the world. Little does the world suspect what it owes to those honored

with this high and rare vocation! And in an outpost mission station of Abyssinia, two rough wooden crosses marked the spot where a sister and a niece lay buried. So it had ever been in her family, as far back as could be traced. And they were all supporting her now, the living and the dead of her line, all solid behind her now. How could she be crushed by the forces of evil?

O sons and daughters of France, of a truth, above all the races of Christendom, yours is the conquering missionary race! How many towns and villages, how many mountains and plains and swamps and forests, have echoed back the gay French laughter of your incomparable religious! A packet of coffee, a handful of rice, and away they go and they count it nothing, for they have the tireless feet, and the brave spirit and the uncalculating generosity. And all over the world there are hearts that go out to them. They look for no temporal reward, but that is part of their reward even here; and surely they will one day have a greater, since our God loves the cheerful giver.

But Ernest knew nothing of all this. He merely felt singularly at ease, singularly secure. Mother

Mary Francis Xavier would have made a splendid captain: he would have followed her unhesitatingly into the thick of the fight.

Presently she rose and shook hands with him again, repeating her invitation to come to the convent whenever he could, and then she departed, leaving Clare to show him out.

The child halted in the passage.

"Uncle Ernie," she said coaxingly, "when you have your holidays will you come and take me out? I want to see something very particular."

"Well?" he asked encouragingly.

"I want you to take me to a boxing-match. It must be lovely! Paula's brother is a heavy-weight champion. Do you know what that means?"

Ernest nodded.

"She's awfully set up about it—he wins cups, you know. It must be simply glorious to have a heavy-weight brother."

She sighed. Then, suspicious of his continued silence:

"You *will* take me to a boxing-match, won't you?"

"I'll see what I can do," said Ernest cautiously.

Just then a man came around the corner. He was

of late middle age, and the dominating expression on his clean-shaven, intellectual face was one of resolute yet melancholy peace. His was the peace of effort not of victory, for in the world of the spirit he had not yet attained to the stature of the old French nun. He walked with his head a little bent. Clare clutched at Ernest's arm convulsively:

"Look!" she whispered when he had passed. "That's Molly O'Halloran's father. Mother Francis Xavier lets him come and pray in our chapel. It's so sad, you see—his son has been killed. He's a beautiful singer, and so funny—he *does* make you scream. Mummy took me to a music-hall to hear him last Christmas. And he's so good—he goes to Holy Communion every morning."

She paused, breathless, and the sad comedian of the Halls went on his way to attend Benediction in the humble chapel. He had been educated at Downside, and carried a volume of Virgil in his pocket. Once, he had walked the wards of a big London hospital, but that was before he had discovered that his allotted task was to minister to the flagging hearts and minds of men, and only indirectly to their bodies. His was no unimportant calling in days when laughter

is as the dry crackling of thorns, and when the spirit of mirth, which in the ages of faith bubbled over even into holy things, is for the most part wanting.

Ernest perceived a loophole that promised escape from a threatened dilemma.

"It would be awfully nice to go and hear him the next time I come up," he suggested.

"Oh no! Uncle Ernie," said his small adopted niece with something akin to dismay. "It would be *quite* a waste of you. Why, Mummy can do that. But I know she'd never take me to a boxing-match."

The Lancashire Sister whom Ernest thought to be a foreigner came forward to open the street door, and Clare's hot little hand released his.

"I'm all behind," she lamented. "I've never even said my rosary yet for General Foch—for his intention, you know."

Ernest did not know, but on the step he turned to give her a friendly farewell glance. She stood smiling just inside the doorway, a shade of anxiety on her mobile face as she called after him:

"You faithfully won't forget what I told you about putting the stamps on the proper side of the picture postcards?"

"I faithfully won't forget," he promised.

The door closed behind him, and he was outside again in the mean suburban street. Slowly he made his way to the point where he could regain the tramway lines. How big a world it was! What a lot there was to find out in it! What queer people one met! The hour spent within the narrow brick walls of the house that did duty for a convent had immeasurably widened his horizon. As once the New Zealander and the Canadian had opened his eyes to the immensity of the physical world, so now the withered fingers of the old religious had lifted for him a corner of the curtain that concealed a vaster world still. It was not what she had said, for indeed she had said next to nothing. It was not what she had done, for he was ignorant of her past. It was just herself—what she *was*.

He thought of her still as he sat in the tram. He quite forgot that he had once disapproved of monks and nuns and had even called them "drones," borrowing the expression from a lecturer in the parks. But then, what chance had the crazy ramparts of his materialism before the onslaught of heroic sanctity!

CHAPTER XIV

"The Vision Splendid."

EMMY and Algy were safely "tied up," to employ their own phrase, and Ernest was back at Bunny's House. He had broken definitely with Maud. They had had one walk out together, but it had not proved a success. He had talked mainly about Bunny's House, about the cows and the pigs and the hay and the cherries, and all too clearly she had seen that it was most improbable he would ever return to urban life. She gave him to understand that she thought such things rather common, and that for her part she never intended to become a cabbage. They parted very good friends, each perhaps secretly relieved at the obliging attitude of the other. On the whole, Ernest was more patiently interested in Jazz than Maud was in apples.

He was back in time for the hay harvest, followed later by that of the wheat and oats and barley. It was a busy summer, for everybody was short-handed.

Often, Ernest was up at three in the morning, fruit-picking. Gooseberries and currants and strawberries and cherries will not wait, and they had to be picked and weighed and driven in to Saltash, to put on the rail for Plymouth or London. The birds were as busy as the farm-folk—that was the worst of it. In spite of nets, in spite of noisy clappers constructed on the system of windmills, they got more than their fair share. Greedy, wasteful little songsters! They damaged more than they could eat, and left it lying spoilt upon the ground.

When the long beautiful day was at an end, the golden moon would shine out over the glorious hilly cornfields in this land of pleasing contours and entrancing undulations. Later, it lighted up the stubble, scarcely less beautiful. When fields had been plowed, their outline showed against the sky in a manner peculiarly satisfying to the sense of form. Why he cared for it all so much, Ernest could not have explained, but he did care for it. The very curing of the bacon filled him with enthusiasm; and then, never could he have supposed that so many different things were made out of a pig! At Bunny's House, when a pig was killed, they lived for a fort-

night on what the Squire called "miscellanies," and every day there was some fresh dish. If at the end of that time Ernest was inclined to feel a little bilious, he would certainly have maintained, had you challenged him, that it was well worth while. He had a brain that loved to accumulate facts, and he became a perfect mine of information about pig-meat, and also about cider.

Harry made the cider for both Marraton and Bunny's House under Mr. Warfelton's personal supervision, and there was justice in the Squire's contention that it was the finest in the county. When the apples had been crushed between the rollers of the mill, they were placed in the press with a layer of reed between each layer of apples. Under the pressure, the juice ran out into a big vat, and very quickly began to ferment. Then, in two or three days, when a crust had formed on the top, the liquid beneath it was drawn off into hogsheads. No one in the two households breathed freely until this had been done, though really it was the Squire who had all the responsibility on his shoulders, since he it was who decided when the crust had reached the crucial moment. But even when the cider was safely in the

hogsheads, the labor was not quite ended, for, unlike most of his neighbors, the Squire tapped his off a second time as soon as a further crust had formed—a process which in local parlance was termed “rack-ing.” This it was, perhaps, that made the Marraton cider clearer and better than any other in the countryside.

The harvest had been duly gathered in, despite a few days of what Mrs. Tredinnick characterized as “terrifying weather.” Leaves had changed to every imaginable shade of red and yellow and brown, and then had fallen, almost in a night, it had seemed, in a whirl of wind and rain. The cider had been made, and the pigs killed, and the land plowed up and the wheat sown in confidence of the never-failing spring. Ernest was having a course of instruction in hedging and ditching when the bells rang out for the Armistice. The World-War was at an end, and he would not be caught in the toils of the fighting-machine after all. With thankfulness mingled with a curious pang of something akin to disappointment, he went with the Tredinnicks to drink a glass of bees-wing port at Marraton. Laughingly, Mr. Warfelton drank to “the speedy return of gallant Corporal Tredinnick,” and to “the health of our friend Mr.

Grills—spared to us.” And then the Bunny’s House contingent wended its way home along the darkening lane, and spent the rest of the evening in mending and making nets.

Ernest used to love those evenings. The steady light from the big paraffin lamp was reinforced by the glow from the blazing wood fire. The workers would sit round in a circle, and while their fingers were busy with the meshes destined to circumvent the blackbirds and thrushes of the coming season, their minds were free to roam the past and future, and their tongues to wag with the insistence of cherry-clappers in a stiff breeze. Mrs. Tredinnick did the greater part of the talking, the more readily, perhaps, because as her eyesight was no longer what it had been, her attention often wandered from the work. In this way he heard all the gossip of the neighborhood. It was to him like a story-book.

In every family group there is generally one person who more than any of the others would be missed—who is, so to speak, the soul of the home. At Bunny’s House it was Mrs. Tredinnick: you could not imagine it without her. But at Marraton it was the Squire—everything revolved round him. It is,

after all, people like Mrs. Tredinnick and the Squire who are the most important to a nation's life, for it is they who make the homes, and no nation could exist for long without homes. They cause no stir in the world, these people; they are simply there, like water and air; but without them a nation would soon cease to breathe. Yet just because they keep so close to the lines laid down by nature and by duty, those around them do not realize their importance. They are essential to the social lungs, but healthy organisms do not trouble about the requirements of their lungs. When Ernest went to Marraton, as he did every afternoon, he thought principally of Mrs. Parracomb. He was disappointed when he did not see her, pleased when they snatched ten minutes' conversation, for as winter drew on they did not meet so often out-of-doors.

Sometimes, however, she would appear at Bunny's House in the evening, using as pretext a message which Ernest could have delivered quite well, but which had been forgotten. The truth was, she suffered from occasional fits of depression; and, moreover, she liked the feeling of mild adventure that came to her as she found her way along the dark

lane or under the weird shadows of the avenue. She generally dressed for these nocturnal promenades in a short skirt and gaiters, and on dark nights she carried a lantern. Sisceta Warfelton would see her off with faint surprise—it was not her way to rove the lanes at night. But she never tried to dissuade Mary from anything that relieved the monotony of the long quiet winter evenings. And besides, she knew that her friend was not always a good sleeper, and judged that a little evening air and exercise might give her a better night.

Nearly always, when she came, Ernest would escort her back, walking a few steps in front with the lantern, so as to light the way up the steep muddy hill and throw a gleam on the protruding roots that lay in wait to trip them up in the avenue. They did not generally speak much, yet in those brief minutes they came to know each other better. Ernest found out that Mrs. Parracomb was a creature of moods, and that often when her gay vivacity had passed away, it was succeeded by a brooding melancholy. This was partly physical, for her health was by no means what her physique would have led the unobservant to suppose. He learnt that before she came to Marraton

she had been very near a nervous break-down, that she suffered from headache and insomnia, that she could not concentrate her mind for long upon a book. She envied him his love of reading: "It must distract your mind," she said. But Ernest had no worries from which he sought distraction, and everything was still new and fascinating to him. He could not understand how anyone could be dull at Marraton. She laughed at his boyish enthusiasm; and then told him a little sadly that it was all very well for a young man with no dependents, but that she wondered sometimes what would become of her and little Clare if her own health were to break down. She worried too over the child, and questioned whether she would ever grow up strong enough to earn her own living, since she was a bundle of nerves. And then she reproached herself for being anxious, and said that she had always been looked after, and ran indoors with an absurd jest upon her lips, shaking from her shining hair the drops that had fallen from the dripping trees.

Ernest's sympathies went out to her. He came of the class of weekly wage-earners whose future, even in prosperity, is never quite secure; but Mrs. Parra-

comb was of the fur-clad class who had flashed by him, as he trudged from work, in their luxurious motor cars. He had no envious, unfriendly feeling towards them—that at least had been no part of the Grills philosophy of life on which he had been reared. But in any case his affection for Lieutenant Turner had been strong enough to destroy any temptation to hostility. And now his admiration for Mrs. Parracomb enabled him to understand that poverty and insecurity were different for her, harder for her, because of her upbringing. He hated her to be worried, he thought it was unfair, but he was proud and happy that she confided in him. She, for her part, found comfort in the glow of his fresh young sympathy, and in the knowledge that he liked and admired her. And then he was reliable, he was intelligent, this Cockney lad. She felt a very real good-will towards him, and a half-amused but genuine interest. Something, too, of the eternal child in her responded to his inexperienced youth.

Gradually, the winter wore away, and if it seemed long to Mary Parracomb it seemed short enough to Ernest. The time came to sow spring corn and mangolds, and then with March began the planting

of potatoes. Week by week, the days lengthened, the sun shone out once more hot and strong, the tender green peeped forth everywhere, and the earth was still astir. The Squire began to go out again in his wheeled-chair, and one of his first visits was to inspect the budding fruit blossom. He was a little feeblier than last year; he had aged somewhat, yet not very noticeably. Mrs. Parracomb's prevailing mood was now a cheerful one, for Sisceta had promised her that little Clare should spend the long summer holiday at Marraton. And Sisceta? She was tranquilly happy in her quiet way; only now and then a look of melancholy stole into her eyes as they rested on her uncle. Why could not things go on forever? But she did not think ahead—it was not Sisceta's way. She was too occupied with the many little duties of the present—those little duties, so necessary to the lives of others, to the comfort of others.

In March, Corporal Tom Tredinnick came home on leave. He was a cautious, modest young man with not very much to say for himself. Ernest would have liked to hear all kinds of stories of battles and bombardments and shell-holes and Germans, but the soldier was not to be drawn. The two lads were very

good friends, however, and before he went back, Tom confided to Ernest that he was in no hurry to get his discharge. "It's the life of a gentleman in the Army, now the fighting's over," was the verdict of the countryman inured to hard work. All the same, Ernest asked himself sometimes what would become of him when Corporal Tom came home for good, as he would have to do some day. Once, when Mrs. Tredinnick was making far-ahead plans that presupposed he would be always with them, he hazarded:

"But there won't be enough work for me when Tom comes back."

She gave him a searching and affectionate glance: "You're never wanting to go back to London!" she exclaimed.

"No, but you see—"

"Yes, I see, I've thought all about it," she interrupted. "Only I wasn't going to say anything. Doesn't do. And there's some that can't keep secrets."

"I can keep secrets," said Ernest.

"I believe you, so I'll tell you a secret—the people at Doghole are leaving presently."

"Well?" queried Ernest.

"Well! Doghole's a neat little farm, it'd be just the place for you, and it's my belief that the Squire would like you to have it."

"Oh!" gasped Ernest. "But I should never manage it."

"Yes, you would. It's mostly fruit, and we should help—it's only two miles away."

"But I've no money," objected Ernest.

"I know where you could borrow some," said the amazing old woman. "Then I thought of another thing—you might get permission to sublet the cottage and live on here with us. But I've a better plan than that. There's Tamsin Trethewey just got the old-age pension, but it don't go far these days and there's a lot of work in her yet. She'd come to you for her keep and she'd manage the house. And she's a rare one at butter-making—you could have a cow. She'd do very well till you could pick up a wife. Perhaps you've some one in your mind."

"Not I," said Ernest hastily, and it flashed across him what a good thing it was that he had cut himself loose from Maud. Maud in such a setting was unthinkable. But she would never have consented.

"It's to be hoped," said Mrs. Tredinnick, warn-

ingly, "that you'll be taking a fancy presently to a girl round about here who'll make you a good wife. However, it's early days to talk about it, because you're a stranger yet. People are always strangers in these parts till they've lived here seven years. But a holding of your own goes a long way with the girls."

"And then I'm not a stranger," said Ernest. "It's a fact!—I'm almost a Tredinnick."

Truly, Mrs. Tredinnick was a wonderful old woman, a far-seeing old woman! She had lain awake of nights and planned and plotted for the lad she loved—for his benefit, to begin with, and then to keep him near her. And really it was all quite practicable. With the Tredinnicks at his back, Ernest would soon learn to manage a small holding such as Doghole, soon repay any modest sum he might begin by borrowing. And the commandeering of old Tamsin was a master-stroke. Once his first moment of hesitation past, the full glory and excitement of the project burst upon Ernest. A farm of his own! A house of his own! A housekeeper of his own! And all by the time he was nineteen! Who says the world is not a place in which an enterprising youth can forge ahead? Jolly old world!

"Righto!" he cried, tossing his cap into the air and catching it again with considerable dexterity. "Sounds worth looking into."

"No, it don't," rejoined Mrs. Tredinnick promptly. "And what's more, it's not got to have any looking into—not by you. I've told you it's a secret. If it gets out that the people at Doghole are leaving, all the country round will be after the Squire for it. You must keep quiet and leave things to wiser heads than yours."

"Don't you worry," said Ernest good-humoredly. "The country round won't get much out of me." He reflected for a minute. "What made you think of it?" he asked. "You're one of the best, Mrs. Tredinnick."

So she did not go without reward.

But although he might not speak, he thought that there could be no harm in looking, and therefore next day he walked over to Doghole, and discreetly, from a distance, cast many an appreciative glance at his prospective home.

It was about two miles from Bunny's House, and it stood alone amid its fields and orchards half way down a narrow valley. A cartroad led to it—a cart-

road which was scarcely more than a bridle-path. The house was very small—quite a cottage. It had lattice windows, and the tiny porch covered by a climbing rose-bush was approached by a flagged path. Ernest took up his position at a gap in a hedge, whence he could command a good view of garden and porch. He noted with approval the presence of gooseberry and currant bushes: this afforded satisfaction to the practical side of his nature. But he had another side, and this it was that made him gaze with pleasure at the charming view of the little green valley, widening out towards the south in a way that suggested a windier and less cosy world outside. With a leap of imagination, he pictured Tamsin Trethewey standing in the porch, her spotless white apron gleaming from afar, her hand raised to screen the sunlight from her eyes as they watched for the return of the master of all this who was due home to tea. And there was a fine batch of potato cakes in the oven! A little to the left of the porch was an old apple-tree, and under it a seat; it would be a good idea to have tea out-of-doors occasionally. Mrs. Tredinnick should come over, and—and Mrs. Paracomb. Why not? The idea, which seemed a trifle

daring at first, soon took hold of him. Farmers must be hospitable. Perhaps even, Miss Warfelton would come with her; but more often she would come alone, for frequent communication would certainly be necessary between the two houses. And always there would be tea for her—always potato cakes. Ernest whistled blithely the whole length of the way home. But he did not tell Mrs. Tredinnick where he had been.

Peace delayed, but at least there was no more slaughter, and the countryside began to grow animated. The Rector's wife determined to re-inaugurate her weekly garden-parties, which had been suspended during the War, as it would certainly have been bad form to hold them. The Squire contrived as a rule to get out of parties, but even he, under pressure, consented to go for once, on the understanding that he should not be expected to appear again, during that season at all events. As the Rectory stables were small for a number of carriages, Ernest was instructed to walk down, and be in readiness to drive the pony-trap back to Marraton, returning with it in a couple of hours.

“Don't be a minute later,” said the Squire in an

impressive undertone, as he and Sisceta got out of the low carriage at the Rectory gate.

Mrs. Parracomb was also going to the party, but since there was only room for two in the pony-trap, she had to walk. As he drove home, Ernest met her, characteristically a little late, and hurrying to make up time. She gave him a nod and a distracted smile as she fled past—a radiant vision of cream-colored draperies and floating wraps and flushed face. He had never seen her so dressed up before. Thus apparelled, she did not quite belong to his world.

And the Rector's wife had something of the same feeling. She had thought and planned for this party, and had baked for two days to ensure its success. She was most desirous that everyone should have plenty of "splits" or "tough cakes," that every one should taste her sponge-cake and her damson jelly. More especially was she desirous that all should pass off smoothly in the presence of a certain Earl; that he should have enough to eat and drink, and that his motor should appear with promptitude, directly anybody rang for it. All these future, past, and present cares had left their mark upon her anxious face; moreover, she moved stiffly in a new frock.

Mrs. Parracomb sailed into the drawing-room with an air of easy assurance that caused the Rector's wife a little secret annoyance. Certainly, Mary was better dressed than most of the company, and felt no diffidence of any kind as to what she should do or say. The Earl failed to inspire her with awe. Indeed, when the guests went into the dining-room to tea, she drifted to his side, and her watchful hostess from behind the urn distinctly caught the words, "You naughty old man!" The Earl laughed, and murmured something in reply. But it really was unpardonable! In what circles had this dangerous and attractive woman been accustomed to move?

The local heiress was seated beside Mrs. Parracomb and the Earl, and she was making a remarkably good tea. Being an heiress (though on a modest scale) she did not consider it necessary to pay much attention to appearances, and the white knitted coat and cap in which she had cycled over were not of the cleanest. When not occupied with munching, she chattered on inconsequently, sure of a lenient audience, for, owing to her exceptional position, she was the spoilt child of the neighborhood.

"There are some things on which all sensible

people are agreed," she announced now. It was the concluding sentence of a little argument which the Rector's wife had missed.

"Oh, my dear young lady!" expostulated the Earl. "Name one."

"Well, papal infallibility," said the heiress, whose money had come down to her from an Orange linen trader in Belfast. She licked her lips, which were slightly stained with damson jelly, and looked triumphantly at the Earl, confident that her smart rejoinder was unanswerable.

The Rector's wife cast an agonized glance at Mrs. Parracomb, and advanced towards that lady, who was smiling sweetly, with a plate of cake in each hand.

But the Squire, who was also within hearing, gave a delighted chuckle. "You've put your foot into it this time, Miss Betty," he said. The situation, which to the hostess was so tragic, was to him a good joke. But then the Squire could never be serious for long.

"Your example is a little unfortunate," said Mrs. Parracomb, "since I happen to be one of the three hundred million people who don't agree with you on that point." She looked at the heiress very kindly, for the simple reason that she could not help feeling

kindly towards any awkward young person who was badly dressed.

The Earl laughed, and began to speak of his love for Italy. And, seeing that he laughed, the apprehensive look in the eyes of the Rector's wife faded away. Still, on account of the discomfiture of her rich little guest, she felt annoyed at the incident. How could any one have guessed that it was not a suitable remark to make—and in a sensible country rectory too? Really, these strangers with their outlandish religions were a great trial.

At two minutes before six, Ernest drove up in the Marraton pony-carriage, and the Squire congratulated him in a whisper on being two minutes early. "Good boy!" he muttered. "You're on the right side, and that's as it should be on these occasions." Sisceta, who was playing croquet, surrendered her mallet to another guest, and came to drive her uncle home. Ernest ran forward to the gate, and then sauntered along the road after them.

He had not gone many yards before there were flying footsteps behind him.

"Why didn't you wait for me?" gasped Mrs. Paracomb.

"I didn't know you were coming," he answered, "and besides—"

He broke off, but the "besides" told volumes, and Mrs. Parracomb understood. The simplicity of life at Marraton, the friendly terms on which he now stood with her, had made him forget the conventional difference between them. But to-day he had been reminded of it. At Marraton they were comrades but this afternoon at the Rectory she had been the guest, and he the servant in charge of the pony-trap. And, apart from this, he had had it brought home to him that Mrs. Parracomb belonged to a social sphere of which he had little experience. *She* spoke to the Rector—nay, to the Earl—as an equal; and *he* lived with Thomas Tredinnick who, in this backwater of the world, still touched his cap to the "gentry." Theoretically, we are all democrats now-a-days; although practically, in an age of materialism, social standing is largely determined by wealth—not wholly without reason, since wealth can buy, if not culture, yet opportunities for it. But Ernest, with his strong good sense and steady acceptance of fact, could not fail to realize that Mrs. Parracomb was above him—that in manners, in education, in refinement, in varied ex-

perience of life, she possessed advantages which had been denied to him. He did not grudge them to her; his affection was too great, his admiration too wholehearted for that. But the knowledge that she had what he had not, that she could go where he could not, gave him a feeling bordering on irritation. It was not her fault that he was "out of it," but it was hard on him.

"You should have waited for me," she reiterated. "You might have known I should walk home with you."

"How could I tell that you were ready to come?"

"Of course I was ready—I'm like the Squire. Stupid old people!"

"You seemed to be enjoying yourself all the same."

"Oh, it made a change, and I had a good tea. But I'd rather be here walking quietly with you, Ernie. It wasn't at all bad, though. Don't you think I look nice?"

Thus invited, he turned his moody face towards her and surveyed her critically from head to foot.

"Yes, I suppose so," he said.

"You suppose so! That sounds very half-hearted. Why, don't I look nice?"

"You do look nice."

"But what is it you don't like?"

He did not answer.

"Tell me," she pleaded. "It interests me very much, because I do so want to look nice, you know."

"What I don't like is your blouse," he said abruptly. "It's too low in the neck."

Mrs. Parracomb flushed. "Really!" she said. "But it's a very pretty blouse." She was getting angry. "Do you know, you're rather rude." She was the more put out, because in her heart she felt inclined to endorse Ernest's condemnation of this modern fashion, although for quite another reason.

"You bothered me to tell you," said Ernest, "and now you don't like a straight answer. That's a woman all over, and it's not fair."

She thought for a minute. "No, I don't think it is fair," she admitted. "And I want to be fair, though I am a woman."

Instantly, Ernest was mollified. "And I didn't want to be rude," he said. "Only you asked me, and—and I suppose I told you because I like you perfect. It doesn't matter about most people."

"You'll never have me that," she said gently. She

had quite forgiven him. "And after all there's something in what you say," she continued, "only—" She pulled herself up, for she was not going to tell him that her blouses descended to her from friends, and were rarely her own choice.

"I think," said Ernest reflectively, "that necks aren't like hands. It's all right for hands, they can stand a scorching without going so awful. Skin's harder, I suppose," and he held out one of his own hard brown hands. Mrs. Parracomb laughed softly to herself. She was not accustomed to be told that her neck was "awful."

But Ernest, who did not know that she was laughing, was afraid that she was offended, and he had not meant to offend her. Indeed, he could not afford to do so—he liked her too well.

"I hope you're not vexed," he said.

"Vexed! I'm not vexed. I can forgive people a lot when they're cross."

"I'm not cross."

"Not now, perhaps, but you were. You were cross because I was enjoying myself and you weren't. You were a little cross with me, and quite a lot cross with all those poor dear harmless people. And yet, you

know, they are only my acquaintances, and you are my friend."

He glanced at her with a sudden happy expression of surprise.

"Yes, we are friends. We belong. We are fellow employees, for one thing."

"That doesn't matter. You are miles above me—miles above all those people too."

"Silly boy!"

"But you are. There's a feeling—I can't explain it. And besides, any one can see it. But I don't mind. You're really above me, and so I don't mind."

"But we are friends," she insisted. "And friendship makes people equal—even age doesn't count. And you are not to say I am above you, it makes me feel very uncomfortable and deceitful. Listen, Ernie! I'll tell you. I like to chat with the Earl because my own father was just such another kindly, courtly country gentleman. I can remember him perfectly. But my dear mother was quite humble—she came of a "lower" class, as people say, than yours, and my father was cut off by his family for marrying her. It's a sad history—I can't tell it all to you—but you can see now how wrong your ideas about me are.

On one side, I belong to a class below yours in the social scale. I thought I'd like to tell you. Yet why should we trouble ourselves about such things? They must seem very childish to God."

"It's nice of you to tell me," he replied, with his quiet obstinacy. "But it doesn't make any difference—you're miles above me."

It did not indeed make any difference except to strengthen his affection. It filled him with intense gratitude that she should talk to him so trustfully, give him so unreserved a confidence. To his feeling for her was joined henceforth a new warmth of devotion, a longing to serve. Everywhere she went, he felt convinced, she commanded love and admiration. But he was her friend—he, Ernest Grills.

Confidence calls forth confidence. He began to tell her of his secret hope of securing Doghole.

"But it would be simply splendid!" she cried with enthusiasm.

"You won't tell anybody?"

"Of course I won't tell. Surely you can trust me to keep a secret!"

"And you'll come to tea? And Mrs. Trethewey shall make us a lot of potato cakes."

"I shall be always over on some excuse or another."

And thus it came about that Ernest, when he thought of Doghole, invariably saw Mrs. Parracomb on the seat under the apple-tree, eating potato cakes and drinking countless cups of tea. Later, he came to picture her beside a blazing fire of logs in the snug little kitchen-parlor. She would sit there without her hat, the light playing on her expressive face and on her dark and wavy hair. She ruled Doghole; she had furnished it as she liked—for monetary obstacles are of no account in the world of dreams. Tamsin Trethewey hovered in the background, occupied in purely menial services, such as baking. And she was always ready to take charge of everything if he wanted to escort little Clare, and of course her mother, to a boxing-match in Plymouth. For it appeared that Clare enjoyed frequent holidays, and spent the greater part of them at Doghole.

Dreams! How sweet they are, and how uncostly! Ernest had learnt to dream. He was of a concrete turn of mind, and so his visions took a concrete form, but, for all that, there was a marvellously beautiful and ethereal light upon them. Week after week went by and he still dreamed, but ever, as was his nature,

with an added touch of realism and a tendency to bring his Pegasus to earth. Was it, after all, so wonderful, was it quite unreasonable, that the dream should gradually transform itself into a frail and evanescent hope—the hope of a great and shining happiness, wildly remote, it is true, yet almost possible? Had she not called him “friend”? And was she not, on her mother’s side, of his own class? This in itself was a link, although the knowledge of it did not alter the odd quality of his reverence towards her. He asked for nothing but the right to serve—to work for her and Clare, every day and all day long, if she would let him.

CHAPTER XV

"The Light of Common Day."

THE SQUIRE was going down hill. He had enjoyed the summer, and all through the long sunny days had been wonderfully well. He thanked God that he had lived to see justice triumph, and to hear the firing of the hundred-and-one heavy rounds by the warships off Plymouth in celebration of the signing of the Peace. He thanked God, too, that he had been spared to "save" another harvest; and, since he was not one to dwell upon the difficulties of the future, he was able to put aside even legitimate apprehensions and become a child again with little Clare throughout a happy August and September. But with the fall of the leaves his strength began to ebb, and by the time the trees were bare he had ceased to come downstairs. There were even days when he did not quit his bed for his arm-chair.

And Sisceta was sad. He was her all, the center

of her existence, and very soon she would have to face life with no duties to sustain her except those less satisfactory ones which she would be free to make for herself. With her duties, her old home too would disappear, for there would be no place for her at Marraton when her cousin the Captain had entered into possession. His American wife would be mistress then, and again the old house would be filled with the chatter of children's voices, and again would the balusters of the ancestral staircase suffer as a new generation of boys scrimmaged up and down. It was good to think of this young wife over in the States waiting to flow in and fill up the gaps—it was for this that her uncle had kept the home together so faithfully—yet every now and then, when she had time to think about herself—Sisceta felt old and sad.

She had not often time, for there was a great deal to do, even in such a simple illness as that of the Squire. And, so far as was possible, Sisceta liked to fulfill all the homely intimate duties of the sick room herself. Only grudgingly did she yield any of these to Mrs. Parracomb, or to the old nurse who, as always in times of trouble, had come from her Cornish village to see what she could do to help the

family that had invariably befriended her and hers. To-day, it was the Master and Miss Sisceta; to-morrow, it might be a great-nephew with the measles. Always she would be at their disposition so long as she could stand upon her legs. But her strength too was failing, and when she in turn was laid low, there would be no one to replace her in the poorer world of the future.

There came a morning when Sisceta deemed it her duty to write to the Captain, who was in European waters, and tell him that she thought he should try and get immediate Leave if he wished to see his uncle again. She was fingering the letter hesitatingly when Ernest came in for his customary afternoon's work.

"I'll post it for you," he said.

"The only question is, ought it to be a telegram?" she murmured.

"Wait till tea-time," suggested Mrs. Parracomb. "Perhaps the Doctor may have been by then, and you will know better what to do."

Sisceta stuck the letter up in front of the clock on the library mantelpiece, and went back again to her uncle's bedside, for all time spent away from him

seemed a waste to her now. Ernest opened the blotter, and looked at the notes of the letters he was to write, jotted down in Sisceta's neat hand, and at the estate ledger and the invoices which she had put ready for him. Mrs. Parracomb lingered by the fire, not afraid of disturbing him, for she knew there was not much for him to do. But it was a comfort to have him there, ready to spin off on his cycle with letters or telegrams, and to bring back medicine and anything needed from Saltash.

"It's all so sad," she said in a low voice. "My poor Sisceta! You see, it's her life. Do you know, Ernie, I don't think I have ever seen any one so unselfish. And she hasn't an idea of it—she thinks she likes doing things."

"I expect she does like doing them."

"But can't you see that is just the height of unselfishness—the ideal state? How she managed to arrive at it, is beyond my understanding. I'm awfully selfish myself. Even now, instead of thinking only about the Squire and Miss Warfelton, I keep on looking forward and thinking how things will affect me. For he isn't going to get better, you know. And this house has come to seem like home, and

I shall have to find a fresh post—not a home, for I shall never again find a home like this. And then there's Clare. But it's horrid of me to worry about myself at such a moment."

The bare boughs of the plane-tree outside creaked in the wind that blew straight off the creek. Mrs. Parracomb knelt upon the hearthrug and warmed her hands at the flaming logs. To the boy watching her, it seemed intolerable that such a creature should ever be cold or lonely or homeless. The opportunity that he would never perhaps have dared to make for himself had come. In his concern for her, he thought less about his own happiness than about offering her all that was in his power to give. And eagerly, though with a curious thrill of excitement that he strove to suppress, he announced:

"It's not horrid to worry—you can't help it. But I have a plan."

"I have a plan!" The statement sounded dreadfully bald, yet it would be more difficult still to elaborate it. Ernest grew hot, but to Mrs. Parracomb his tone was just the ordinary, pleasant, business-like tone to which she had grown accustomed.

"A plan. What is it?" She waited, half amused,

yet interested, because there was often something original and practical about Ernest's plans.

He kept his eyes upon the threadbare hearthrug and began, speaking very slowly because it was so important and he did not want to make a false step:

"I told you about Doghole," he said. "Whatever happens, I think I shall be able to get Doghole. And I think I can make it pay—the Tredinnicks will help me. It's a small house, but it's rather nice, and it's warm. I can furnish straightway on the hire system, and then I shall work very hard, and I think I shall soon get on. The apples in the big orchard alone sold for a good figure last year."

He paused.

"And then?" she said encouragingly, smiling a little at his boyish pride in his new venture. "You're not wanting a housekeeper, are you?"

"No," said Ernest. "Tamsin Trethewey's going to be my housekeeper—she'll do all the work. But I should like you at Doghole."

He looked away from the hearthrug now and straight across at her, a look of intense entreaty on his face.

Mrs. Parracomb rose very quickly to her feet.

"Dear Ernest," she said, "I can't tell you—"

"Let me finish," he interrupted, spurred on by a desperate fear. "I know it's not what you're used to—what you ought to have. I know I'm not what you're used to either, and besides that, you think I'm a boy. But I've heard you say that love knows no barriers. And you want a home, and I offer you that—the best I've got, all I've got. And if you could be contented there, you and Clare, you should never have any more bothers, and you would have me to work for you always. You told me once that I was your friend—can't you let me do this for you when I want to so much?"

"No, Ernest, I can't," she said with decision. "And I'm dreadfully sorry about this plan of yours; I blame myself very much. But I never dreamed you would think of such a thing."

"I suppose not," he said bitterly.

"Don't speak like that—you hurt me. It's quite true that we've always been friends. I've always treated you as a friend. To be sure, I thought you a boy, but now you've grown up and you've offered me and Clare a home, and I honor you for it. Any woman would feel proud and grateful to be spoken

to as you've spoken to me. But all the same I'm sorry, and I reproach myself for not having taken you still further into my confidence. You see, Ernest, I'm not free—my husband is still alive."

"Why doesn't he look after you then?" said Ernest. "He can't be worth much."

"I'm afraid he's not," she answered sadly. "But still he's my husband. And if he were ill or in trouble, if he were sorry, I couldn't refuse to go to him. You see I was young and inexperienced when I married him, I didn't know what some men were like, and I got let in. I stuck to him as long as I could, as long as it was possible, but in the end I had to come away. And that's another thing I've never told you, my friend Ernest. Clare isn't my child—she's his—by another woman."

"And you have to keep her!"

"I don't *have* to keep her. I went back and rescued her—it wasn't a fit home for the child. Her own poor mother had died, and there was some one else. How could I abandon a poor little innocent child to all that?"

Ernest drew himself up, a determined glint in his

eyes, his mouth set: "Come to Doghole," he said, "and bring Clare."

"You forget," she reminded him gently. "As I told you, I'm not free."

"We have a chance to be happy, all three. Why should a scamp like that spoil it? Besides, you could get a divorce."

"That wouldn't set me free. Catholics can't marry again."

"But that's absurd; you say yourself you didn't know what he was when you married him."

As she did not speak, he continued: "And it's worse than absurd, it's cruel. It's cruel and hateful—and—and silly. I can't think where such an idea came from."

"From the Gospel—Our Lord said it."

"But all that's quite old-fashioned now."

"The Gospel old-fashioned! But you don't understand."

"I hope I never shall."

"But I want you to understand. Please, listen! Let me at least talk to you and tell you things I can't tell other people. It seems a hard law to you, but

then laws are hard on individual cases. And as for me, I knew beforehand. I am a convert, and I knew before I became a Catholic that I was cutting off all chance of an easy life and a home of my own and ordinary human love."

"And yet you did it!"

"I couldn't help myself. I had to do it. You see I had been brought up without any proper religion. I didn't know anything about it, really. I hardly ever went to any church. I just said night and morning a short prayer which my old nurse had taught me when I was a child. I liked pleasure and pretty clothes and flirting, I'm afraid, but I never did anything very bad. It's wonderful, when I come to think about it, how every time I was going to do anything bad, something held me back. It wasn't my own doing—it was just God's goodness. I suppose He had to look after me specially because there was no one else. And then my husband came along, and I thought it would be fine to be married, and he seemed right enough then. And when I found out—what he was like—I stayed with him as long as I could, and I was sorry for him in a way, for

after all, perhaps he couldn't help being born like that. But at last things got too bad, and I came away—"

"Brute!" muttered Ernest.

"Not in some ways," she said thoughtfully. "People are too complicated to sum up in one word. And then one never knows how much is their fault. Anyway, I'm grateful to him for letting me have Clare."

"And leaving you to support her!" He spoke almost roughly to hide his admiration. This, then, was the woman whose blouse he had presumed to criticize, and whom he had once virtually accused of wasting her employer's time.

"Well, I don't know that he can exactly help that either. He has poor health and no money, you see, and I'm afraid he himself is living on some one else as it is. Clare's an anxiety, but she's a great happiness too, the darling! When she calls me "Mummy" and puts her little arms round me, I feel as if I've everything in the world I want. Sometimes, when I think of my friends who scheme and save for theaters and pleasures and clothes, I get

quite sorry for them. It's so much more worth while to save for Clare—to scheme for a little child, a child one has rescued.”

“I would help,” said Ernest in an undertone. But though he said it, he had no longer any hope that she would let him.

“My parents were dead,” she went on, as though she had not heard, “and I had no income, and I didn't know what to do to earn enough to keep myself and Clare. I'm afraid I'm not very useful. I got into a post where they let me have Clare with me, but it wasn't at all satisfactory, and I couldn't think what to do next. One day, when I was out for a walk, I came upon a convent, and I remembered that I had heard that convent schools were often inexpensive and that the nuns were very kind to children. I wasn't sure if this was a school, but the chapel door was open and I went in. Close to the door was a statue of the Sacred Heart—Our Lord, you know. His arms were stretched out towards me, and I can't explain to you the sudden feeling of relief I had. I felt that He was there for me, that He wanted to take care of me, and that He could. Nobody came, and I stayed there over an hour. And

while I was there I felt perfectly happy, perfectly safe, and all my worries went. And I asked Our Lord to find a school for Clare, and very soon He did."

"That wasn't a school, then?"

"No, that wasn't. I went back the next day to see if I should feel the same, and I did, just the same, and again I stayed a long while."

"Whatever did you do all the time?"

"I didn't *do* anything. I just sat there and told Our Lord things, and I got answers."

"But it was only a statue."

She was silent.

"It was only a statue," he repeated.

"That was only a statue, of course. But—you've heard of the Real Presence, Ernest?"

He nodded. Had he not! It seemed to him preposterous, yet so invariably did the subject protrude itself whenever he began to think about religion, that instinctively he had ruled out all forms of faith that did not teach it. They simply did not count for him.

"Yes, but it can't be true," he said now.

"We won't argue about it—it doesn't do any good. Besides, I'm not clever enough to argue. I'm very

stupid, really. I haven't got reasons ready in my mind like some people, and I can't read anything at all stiff now. I can't even keep my mind on a book for long since my illness. If only I were some one else talking to you! If only I could explain how it is that I am sure it's true! For I am sure. And so you can understand how dreadful it would be for me to break the laws of my religion simply because they're hard—God's laws, that you call 'old-fashioned.' And if you could persuade me to do it, and I forgot my Faith for a time, the satisfaction wouldn't last, and I should soon be utterly miserable. For I should have lost all I have, what is more to me than everything else in the world, and nothing would make up for it, and you would have dragged me down. . . .”

He gazed fixedly into the fire, and a burnt log collapsed, crushing the delicate red landscape in miniature that a moment before had glowed so bravely beneath it. Even so, Ernest's dream-world had been shattered by contact with unyielding realities. He knew very well that he could never build it up again. He could not fight against circum-

stances, still less could he fight against her Faith. He did not even want to try, since it could only hurt her, and he loved her.

At last he raised his head.

"I shall never drag you down," he said with energy. "Never! We won't talk about it any more. I see it's no good."

He would have been surprised at that moment, had he caught the look of proud affection in her eyes, but because he could not meet her glance, he turned towards the window, and listened while she spoke to him with an intense kindness in her voice that trembled every now and then. She tried to make him understand that henceforth they were linked together, although not in the way he once had hoped. And he did feel that in some indefinable manner he had come closer to her. But when she spoke of his own plans and of Doghole, he shook his head.

"Not Doghole," he murmured. "Never Doghole now."

That was the worst moment for him. It was a relief when the handle of the door turned and Sisceta

appeared round the corner of the screen. She looked haggard and anxious.

"I've decided it must be a telegram, Ernie," she said.

That night when Ernest undressed, he omitted for the first time the prayer that Mrs. Parracomb had taught him on the site of the ruined chapel. He considered that the Powers above had played him false, and so he took no further interest in them, except to nurse a sense of injury. But he could not go to sleep, and presently, feeling unhappy because he had not kept the only promise she had ever exacted from him, he sprang up, for to pray in his warm bed would have been quite unthinkable to him. English people as a rule say their prayers kneeling, but Ernest, with the vague idea of more than making good his temporary omission, stood to repeat his formula, as long ago he had seen the French Zouave stand. I am afraid, in his poor little human way, he thought more about Mrs. Parracomb than about his Creator and hers. And although he was not again tempted to break his promise, he decided, with this one exception, to "cut all that sort of thing," as he expressed it. After all, there seemed nothing in it.

And, indeed, for a time he felt too sick of heart and apathetic to concern himself with the problem of the Whence and Whither of existence. He simply did not care.

CHAPTER XVI

"A Presence Which Is Not to Be Put By."

FOUR weeks later the Squire died. He fell asleep one night as peacefully as a child and did not wake again. "That's a right enough way," remarked Mrs. Tredinnick, "when people are properly prepared, but it wouldn't do for everybody," and she threw a glance of severe warning at the farmer, who was becoming more lazy than ever about going to church. She did not succeed in disturbing him. "I reckon the Lord knows best," he remarked tranquilly, between the puffs of his pipe, "and anyway, let us all mind our own business."

It was a melancholy time, the more so because there was not very much to do for the subordinate figures in the drama. The Captain took everything in hand, and sat in the library, taciturn and unapproachable, writing, directing, straightening out everything. There was a good deal to straighten out amid the happy-go-lucky conglomeration of details which

yet did not amount to a muddle. Ernest did what he was told, but his duties were now of a humbler nature, and he was no longer trusted to write letters or to make business arrangements. The Captain did all that himself, and Ernest drifted more and more into the position of a dispatch rider. He was for ever to be seen cycling along the Saltash road.

Yet he did not dislike the Captain. He could not have disliked any one so just and so capable. And presently he discovered that beneath the stern exterior lay a real kindliness of heart. Not Mr. Turner, not the Squire even, had displayed more interest in Ernest's future or talked to him about it more sensibly.

But by the time the Captain found leisure to tackle him upon the subject, the lad had made up his own mind. At first the crumbling of his boyish hopes had filled him with misery, but this was succeeded by a period of lethargic indifference. Once, indeed, there had been a time when he himself would readily have agreed that such hopes were chimerical; but he had lived with them day by day for months, and thoughts on which one falls asleep at night and which one wakes to in the morning, come in the end

to seem quite natural. Familiarity causes them to appear practicable, and when their inherent impossibility or absurdity is ruthlessly revealed, it is as though a bit of one's very self were torn away. Ernest was all at sea. He had no plan or aim for his life now, nothing to which he cared to look forward. Without the genial presence of the Squire, Marraton grew intolerable to him and Bunny's House came to seem lonely. Besides, since he could no longer bear to think of Doghole, there was no permanent place for him, for Tom Tredinnick would soon be coming home. Yet he loved the old farm. He loved every corner of it, every path through orchard, field and wood, the miniature quay where he had played as a boy, even the stagnant duck-pond. It would be painful to leave it all, but it was painful to stay. And a certain impatience in Ernest's nature inclined him to be in a hurry to shelve his difficulties by cutting himself loose and beginning afresh. This was what he had done after the Lieutenant's death, and now that he was in a more lamentable state of mind still, there seemed nothing for it but to repeat the process.

One dry windy Sunday, unable longer to bear the

look of apprehensive watchfulness in Mrs. Tredinick's eyes, he went out for a tramp by himself to think matters over. He climbed up and up through the steep fields, until, standing on a high bare point in a gale of wind, he looked right across to a distant line of cold blue. The sea! Emblem of drastic parting, despite all modern means of transit. For many years to come, the sea must still spell separation for the majority of men, because of the expense of crossing it. And Ernest wanted something drastic. The stiff breeze, the suspicion of salt in the air, the sight of the steel-blue water, awakened in him a forgotten memory. "Why don't you cross?" said a voice out of the past. "I reckon any man with health and sense can make his way over yonder." Ernest had scorned the idea that day in the Cornish express, but things looked different now—they do when you feel half a century older. To-day, his thoughts leaped the heaving ocean and rested on the wide prairie that lay beyond it, on the low wooden house and the horses and cattle and agricultural implements. They were a goodly sight. Once again hope began to flicker faintly in his heart; on his way home he vaulted a gate.

When, therefore, the Captain spoke to him about his future, he had an answer ready: he intended to emigrate. The man of the sea nodded a curt approval, and asked him what he thought of Canada. He, the Captain, had interest in Canada and would help. It was surprising how matters were smoothed out, how satisfactory an opening was found for Ernest, how generously the Captain assisted him to an outfit. Only Mrs. Tredinnick sulked a little, her "curvy" face drawn into straighter, disapproving lines. "What you want to go off to the wilds for, God alone knows!" she said.

"To make my fortune," Ernest told her. "And then I'll come back and take you to the seaside for a fortnight, and we'll go on the pier every evening."

He meant it, forgetting in his thoughtless youth that he would have to make his fortune pretty quickly if he wanted to have her company at the seaside.

The old lady snorted, but she did not say anything to throw cold water on his scheme. She had far too generous a nature for that.

Afterwards, when the figures in Ernest's past had sorted themselves out, and the passage of time had

rendered his perspective more reliable, it was extraordinary what a prominent position that quaint and friendly face came to occupy in the portrait gallery of his mind. Mrs. Tredinnick would have been amazed had she known how often and how wistfully his thoughts were turned towards her. She might even have been a little annoyed, since she strongly disapproved of "mooning." Always he saw her with Bunny's House for background—Bunny's House, of which she was the soul, and of which she had made the happiest of homes. He had always loved it and her; he had always been grateful. But how much there had been to love, how much for which to be grateful, he did not find out until he was too far away to do anything but write cold words on unresponsive paper.

It was a dull February afternoon when Ernest went to Marraton to take his leave. Next day he was going to London, and after a week at home was to sail from Liverpool.

Just outside the hall door he met the Captain.

"Good-by, my lad," he said kindly. "And good luck! I will always do anything I can for you."

"Thank you, Sir," replied Ernest. He was con-

scious of a funny touched feeling. People were very good to him. He knew he did not deserve it.

"You'll find the ladies in the library," said the Captain.

Sisceta and Mary Parracomb were working by the fire. They looked up as Ernest entered, and Sisceta told him to find a chair.

"So you've come to say good-by," she said. But Mrs. Parracomb did not speak. She kept her eyes upon her work. Ernest was sorry to see her looking pale and dejected. He had not been much thrown with her since the Squire's death, for the old intimate family life had been broken up.

He sat down now, feeling embarrassed and unhappy. Partings were hateful things.

Sisceta laid aside her work.

"It was a good day that brought you to Bunny's House, Ernie," she said. "We've all of us liked having you, and Uncle was very fond of you. I'm so glad you were here to help him during this last year."

"I shall never forget you all," said Ernest. "I shall never forget the Squire—he was so jolly and so good."

"Wasn't he!" murmured Sisceta, flushing with pleasure at the praise of him she loved.

A silence followed. She clasped and unclasped her hands.

"Do you know," she began in a low tone, "I've never told anybody what happened three weeks before Uncle died, but I should like to tell you two. I was getting him ready for the night, and I had just fetched up a little jug of boiling water to wash his teeth. I had taken them out and was brushing away at them with my back turned to Uncle, when suddenly I felt that some one else was in the room. I looked round, and it was Christ. He stood between me and the bed, looking straight at me, and I knew at once Who it was, though He was unlike any picture of Him that I can remember having seen. He was tall, and He was dressed all in white, and He had fair hair. He was grave, and yet He looked at me very kindly—oh, so kindly! In His right hand He held a palm, so that it slanted across His left arm. When I noticed that, I understood that He had brought it for Uncle, because Uncle had led such a good life. But Uncle lay there and didn't seem to see Him, and I didn't like to speak, although I longed to do so.

And while I was wondering what to do, whether I should tell Uncle or not, Christ faded away, and I felt so dreadfully sorry when I couldn't see Him any more. And ever since I keep thinking of my beautiful vision, for I remember it perfectly and always shall. And often now I wish I had spoken of it to Uncle before he died, but I didn't like to mention it because the Doctor said he was to be kept very quiet. Yet I do so wish he could have known how Christ came and brought him a palm. Oh, he was a good old man! And he was always so grateful. Not many days before I saw the vision he had said to me: 'I pray a lot for you because you've been so kind.' But of course I liked doing the things."

Nobody said anything. Sisceta gazed into the fire, seeing again with her mind's eye the beautiful and consoling vision whose memory would never fade while she drew breath, asking herself once more if she should not have spoken to her uncle about it before he passed into the silence.

At last Mary Parracomb whispered: "How wonderful, Ceta dear! And what an honor!"

"Yes," said Sisceta simply. "But Uncle was so good."

Again only the ticking of the clock was heard. But Ernest's practical inquiring mind could not for long be silenced.

"So that's what is called a vision, then?" he said.

"I suppose so," replied Sisceta.

"And you had never seen anything of the sort before?"

"Never."

"And did Christ look *real*?"

"Quite real."

"Not misty?"

"Not in the least misty."

"And if you had put out your hand, do you think you would have felt anything? Would you have expected to touch cold air, or a real solid body?"

"I think I should have touched a real solid body."

Low whistling and a step upon the gravel announced the Captain's return. Mrs. Parracomb rose.

"Wait while I fetch my coat and hat, Ernie," she said. "I'm coming out with you. We won't say good-by within four walls."

CHAPTER XVII

*"Da Totum pro Toto . . . et Tenebræ
non Conculcabunt Te."*

THE HALL door slammed behind them, and she turned a resolutely cheerful face towards his troubled one.

"Don't look so lugubrious—Mrs. Tredinnick says you're going away to make your fortune. Of course, it's always horrid to say good-by, but I think one feels better if one does it out in the open, don't you?"

"It doesn't seem to me to make much difference," said Ernest. "It's got to be done."

The mind of each was occupied at first with what they had just heard, though neither of them cared to talk about it. Mrs. Parracomb was marvelling over Sisceta's simple goodness and humility; Ernest was puzzled, thus unexpectedly confronted by the Figure he had decided to banish from his thoughts.

They set their faces towards the creek and Bunny's House, passing through the wicket gate into the

avenue. Silently they trod the damp beech-mast beneath the bare and dripping trees. It was not cold; there was even a touch of spring in the air. By common consent they halted before what remained of the diminutive grotto. There was something woe-begone in this relic of a vanished childhood: material objects are so helpless. Mrs. Parracomb stooped and began searching for a flat stone with which to repair the roof.

"We ought to have gone to the old chapel," she reflected, "only the grass is so long and wet. There's something more lasting about the chapel."

"I'm glad we didn't go there," said Ernest moodily. "It hasn't brought me luck."

"Luck! What a word to use!"

"Well, faith then."

It might have done Ernest good to learn to drive a Tank—to forge straight ahead towards a definite concrete objective outside him. As it was, he was advancing through chaotic country in pedestrian fashion: here, a paltry hillock blocked his view; there, a ravine led him winding back, away from his destination. It is no easy matter to find one's path in the confused world of to-day. He had no clear idea

yet what faith was. Faith is a gift, certainly, but it must rest upon an act of the reason. It is not sentiment, or fancy, or magic. Our reason must be convinced that God exists, and that He has spoken, before we can believe what He has said and acknowledge what He founded. For the unbeliever, I take it, the normal preliminary to faith is not feeling or imagination, but sincere, and so far as may be, unprejudiced inquiry into an historic fact, an objective reality, the credentials of an Authority which if authentic must from its very nature be supreme. It is significant of the unparelled confusion of our times that so many searchers miss the very point at issue. *O lux beatissima!* Never perhaps was the need of prayer for light more urgent. Never perhaps were more men of good will in a fog.

Rather sadly, Mrs. Parracomb judged that Ernest was hopelessly astray, and that, humanly speaking, she was not competent to help him. She had not arrived by the great trade route.

"You keep your promise?" she asked.

"You mean the prayer? Of course I keep my promise, but it isn't any good—I've not been guided. You can't say I've been guided. There seems to me

no sense in life, nothing but disappointments and changes and upsets. And you can never keep hold of what you care about. Either people die, or you have to leave them and go off to a foreign country and begin all over again."

"It's hard, I know—a lot of life is hard."

"One gets sick of it. What next, I wonder?" he grumbled.

"Oh, lots of things next! You're not out of your teens yet, are you?"

Ernest looked at her with some resentment, wondering if she were laughing at him.

"It's all very well for you."

"No, it's not all very well for me. Do you suppose I shan't miss you? Do you suppose it's nothing to me to hurt you? Do you suppose it's easy for me to put right away out of my mind the things that other women think about?"

"That's what vexes me most—you. I shall be all right knocking about."

"Then I hope you'll be pleased when I tell you something. Do you know, I'm going to live at Dog-hole. The Captain has offered the cottage to Miss Warfelton, and he's thinking of farming the land

himself. And she has asked me to stay on with her. I'm glad, because it would have been a great trial to her to go right away from her old home; and I'm glad for myself too, because I dreaded having to face the world again. Aren't you, too, a little glad for me, Ernie?"

Doghole! The dream had shifted. She would be there after all, and Clare too, doubtless. But it was not to be his doing. And he would be far away, alone in a strange land. There was a perceptible pause, then he said more passionately than she had ever heard him speak:

"I'm most awfully glad for you."

To steady himself, he turned and looked across the little valley. The light was waning, and the mists were creeping up from the marsh. Presently they hid the steep grassy slope opposite and the grey stone buildings on the top.

"I should very much like to see Canada," observed Mrs. Parracomb.

"Should you?"

"Yes, and I should like to visit the Shrine of St. Anne de Beaupré. It's a sort of Canadian Lourdes, you know. I've just been reading an account by an

American lawyer who saw a man cured there—a man who had been totally blind for twenty-eight years. If you're ever near the Shrine, Ernie, do go and put a candle for my intention."

He smiled. Just for a moment he felt the older of the two.

But her words had started a train of ideas. His thoughts went forward to his new home. He had not much experience or much imagination, but he was observant and endowed with a retentive memory, therefore he constructed it on the lines of a big railway advertisement of the Rockies, which he had once seen in a London station. Above, he placed the mountains and the snow and the precipices; while below, basking in golden sunshine, he arranged his belt of prairie, with a low wooden house, and horses, and cattle, and agricultural implements, after the pattern of the photographs shown him in the past by the Canadian in the train. Moreover, to complete the picture, he plumped down St. Anne's Shrine in the form of a cathedral with a spire, bearing a strong resemblance to an old engraving of Salisbury on which his eyes had often rested as he sat working in the library at Marraton. It did not occur to him

that it looked out of place in the center of his sparsely populated plain.

After all, it was no strange unfriendly land to which he was going. Across three thousand miles of ocean, from unfamiliar plains and mountains, the Lamp of Hope beckoned him. There too, in that distant sanctuary it shone, a small red Light, linking him with Europe and with those he loved. His quest was not over—it was only beginning. There too he would have his chance—fresh chances. Unnoticed by him, the pain of loneliness and of parting was lightened.

"You'll let me know how you get on," said Mrs. Parracomb.

"Of course. I'm going out to work hard and provide for Clare. That'll be one load off your mind. You can't stop me from working for Clare."

"I don't want to stop you."

She gave him her hand. He shook it firmly, but very quickly, and walked away.

"Write directly you land," she called after him.

Ernest faced round. "I shall write to you from St. Anne de Beaupré," he cried. "I'm going straight there to put a candle for you."

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